

# CLIFFORD SIFTON

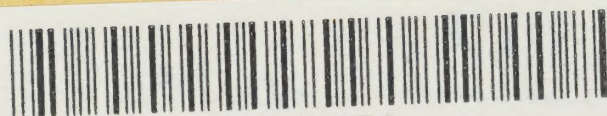
IN RELATION TO HIS TIMES

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CLIFFORD SIFTON  
IN RELATION TO HIS TIMES





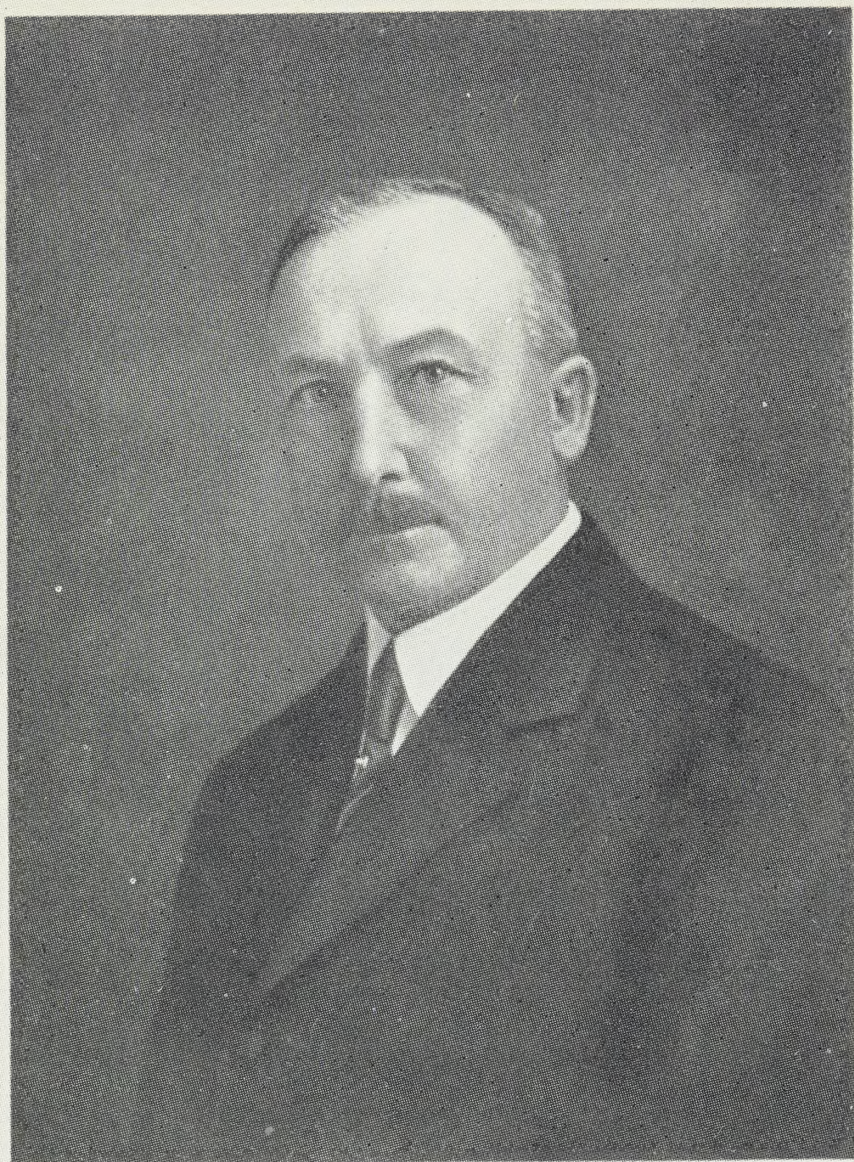




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A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Clifford Sifton', written in a cursive style. The signature is positioned below the portrait photograph.

SIR CLIFFORD SIFTON  
In later life



# CLIFFORD SIFTON

*in relation to*

## HIS TIMES

*by*

*John W. Dafoe*



*Toronto: The Macmillan Company of  
Canada Limited, at St. Martin's House  
1931*



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TO

THOMAS ALEXANDER CRERAR

OF WHOM CLIFFORD SIFTON ONCE  
WROTE, "I LIKE CRERAR AND  
TRUST THAT HE WILL  
REMAIN IN PUBLIC  
LIFE."







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## INTRODUCTION

If in one sense a statesman's contemporaries, even after death has abated the storm and temper of faction, can scarcely judge him, yet in another sense they who breathe the same air as he breathed, who know at close quarters the problems that faced him, the materials with which he had to work, the limitation of his time—such must be the best, if not the only true memorialists and recorders.—*John Morley: Life of Gladstone.*

The writing of this memoir has been to me a labour of love and an obligation of friendship. It is an attempt to do inadequately for Sir Clifford Sifton what he was often urged to do for himself. In his conversations he would often review the reasons for his policies and the purposes he sought to serve by them. He was urged to reduce these to memoranda which would be available later for publication. He was indifferent to the suggestion. His position was that his acts and policies spoke for themselves, and that misunderstandings about them were of no consequence. They would pass. If they did not it would not very greatly matter. In life he did not consciously seek popularity; of still less concern to him was the judgment of posterity. He spoke sometimes of the irrationality of many of the attacks made upon him. "It seems to me," he once said, "that most of the things that I was abused about were easily defensible as in the public interest. Some things that I rather expected to be taken to task about passed unnoticed, or earned me commendation."

His refusal to take notice of much that was said was part of his philosophy of life. "Ignore all whispering cam-



paigns," he once said to a young friend just entering politics. "If you once show yourself affected by it, you are lost. The more you try to stamp it out, the more it spreads." When he was in public life he would meet with alacrity in Parliament or on platform, the personal opponent who would state his case to the same audience; but this was as far as he would go. He walked by or through the mob of individual or anonymous assailants. Two months before his death, during a visit which I paid him in Florida, he restated to me the reasons which lay behind some of his most assailed policies; and defended them anew in the light of the results achieved; and I renewed my suggestion that he should prepare a memoranda covering the main achievements of his public life, not so much as a defence as a contribution to the history of our times. This he agreed to do. But it was then too late.

His attitude of reserve helped to build up the conception of Clifford Sifton, as a man cold and ruthless by nature, insensible to emotions of pity or fear which was current in his life time. That such a conception could have been formed and could have persisted for so long, shows how little relationship there may be at times between widely held beliefs and the facts. I have known no case where the accepted idea of the character of a man was so widely at variance with the reality as known to his intimates,—with perhaps the exception of his brother Arthur, who protected a naturally generous nature with a mask of stoical impassivity that would have done credit to a Mohawk Chief undergoing the ordeal of fire. Clifford Sifton had an Irish temperament: warm, genial, high-tempered, loyal and generous, adventurous and combative. The first bit of business I ever did with him was broken by an interlude in which he met a demand upon his private benevolence. But back of this temperament was an inflexible and imperious will, servant to an intelligence that, to an exceptional de-

gree, could detach itself from the qualifying or controlling influences of surrounding circumstances. He was born with the ambition and the capacity for leadership; his intelligence marked out the objective to be reached, and his will found the road to it over all obstacles and retarding influences. But the ardour of the pursuit, which gave to the average onlooker an impression of ruthless efficiency, never obscured to his friends the engaging personality which linked men to him with hooks of steel. He was exacting in his demands upon himself, his associates and his subordinates; fools he suffered neither gladly nor at all; for incompetency in all its variations and behind all its disguises he had a searching and judging eye. But to all those who measured up to his requirements he was staunch and understanding in friendship and loyalty, and generous in appreciation.

His qualities of leadership were very exceptional. He developed men who were fortunate enough to be associated with him by entrusting them with responsibilities and giving them free scope for their powers, while keeping in co-operative contact with them. He would set for his associates and assistants the most difficult of tasks, in the belief, implied and often expressed, that they were equal to it, as they frequently were,—often to their own surprise. It was a breathless and exciting but stimulating business to work side by side with Clifford Sifton in the activities to which he really put his hand.

Sir Clifford Sifton had not in any marked degree the disposition of the social or political reformer. He did not enter public life for the purpose of breaking up systems and institutions and remoulding them to his heart's desire. He regarded things as they were as about the best that the world could do up to date,—not as a finality but as a practical starting point. He knew when he entered public life that acceptance of the standards and methods of his



time would be necessary if he was to have a political career. He was under no illusions about them, and in due time he bore testimony against them as not in the public interest. But he accepted and used them just as contemporaries did, but more effectively—hence much outcry. Patronage, for instance, was recognized when he entered public life as an instrument of politics. The spoils system was passing, there was no wholesale proscription of officials upon a change of Government, but appointments were made on a frankly partizan basis, and availability for political activities was not a disadvantage with respect to appointments to the outside service. There were campaign funds then as there are now, though they were then of very modest proportions indeed, judged by more modern standards. Sir Clifford Sifton knew about campaign funds; he raised them; he expended them. He told the public what he really thought about them and their effect on public life, in his contribution to the *New Era* in 1917, when he proposed drastic methods for stamping out the raising and spending illegitimately of campaign funds. "This evil," he wrote, "is the bane of democracy; it is the nightmare of every man in public life who is anxious to give service to the State." He declared that it could be stamped out if the public really desired this to be done, and he outlined his methods: strict laws and provisions for almost automatic enforcement of them. Sir Clifford, when he left office after fourteen years' experience, would doubtless have agreed with Sir George Lewis, who said that government is a very rough affair at best, a huge rough machine, and those concerned in working it have to be satisfied with what is far below the best. There might be said of him what Lord Morley said of Gladstone: "He did not feed upon illusions."

Life to Sifton was adventure and drama. He was born to strive with his fellows. While success at the end was

desirable and indeed essential, as putting a seal upon the efficiency of his methods, it was the planning, the manoeuvring and the contest that led to this end out of which he got his deepest satisfaction. This was true in politics, in business and in sport. He liked to take chances where he had first calculated the possibilities and surveyed the terrain. Nothing could be more characteristic of him than the account of how, when he changed residence, he moved his securities from Ottawa to Toronto. The problem was to transfer securities for a very substantial amount from the vaults of a Trust Company in Ottawa to the vaults of a similar company in Toronto. If Sir Clifford had followed the customary course he would have turned the job over to the Trust Company, at the same time heavily insuring the securities; and the Trust Company would have transported them in a carefully guarded express car. But Sifton did the business differently. On a certain day he, in company with one of his sons, appeared at the Trust Company in Ottawa with two suit-cases and a trunk, into which the securities were shovelled. He then departed for the station. The trunk was checked to Toronto and the suit-cases were carried into the parlour car. Upon arrival at Toronto the suit-cases and trunk were delivered to the vaults of the Trust Company in Toronto which remained open to receive them. Sifton held, in high spirits, that in this enterprise he really took no chances.

There has been speculation as to how, in view of his political capacity and his early success, Sir Clifford missed the ultimate prize—the Premiership. It is usual to attribute this loss to his physical infirmity—deafness. It is indeed highly probable that if his hearing had been normal the breaches with Laurier in 1905 and 1911 would not have taken place. If he had been able to take part freely in the daily tide of conversation that flowed through the government offices and the clubs of Ottawa during the early



weeks of 1905, he would never have gone south in the belief that he had a definite understanding with Sir Wilfrid about the extent of the educational concessions to be given the minority in the Alberta and Saskatchewan constitutions. Rumours that a combination was being formed to restore to the minority the rights taken away by the Haultain ordinances were current in Ottawa; but he heard nothing of them. Had he known, the battle would have been fought out in the council chamber and nothing would have been heard of the victory which he would undoubtedly have won. If he had remained in the government the reciprocity issue in 1911 would not have arisen. Laurier was not passionately devoted to the cause of reciprocity with the United States; he took it up because of pressure from some of his colleagues, especially Mr. Fielding. Had there been a conflict of opinion within the cabinet Laurier would have temporized and played safe. Had these two issues not arisen Sir Wilfrid might have died Prime Minister, and in that event Sir Clifford might well have been his successor.

But these ingenious ventures into the realms of "What might have been" are idle. It can be said that there was no good reason why Laurier and Sifton should not have got along amicably together for their natural lives, if there had been frank exchanges of opinion between them. Temperamentally and in their points of view they were not far apart. They were both Whigs, strong in their desire to hold office, fully conscious of their obligations to use office for the advancement of the country's interests, yet moderate in their expectations of what they could accomplish in the way of permanent advance. One of Sifton's Whig qualities was his consistent advocacy, while in the government, of administrative economy; he played in council, to some considerable extent, the role of watchdog of the treasury. There were bonds of friendship between Laurier and Sifton

which survived three major disagreements. The place of honour in Sir Clifford's library, in his successive residences, was always given to a crayon drawing of Laurier which had been made for him. This portrait was often the starting point of reminiscences having to do with "the chief"—usually laudatory in a discriminating way. In any discussion about Sir Wilfrid and his works he could usually be counted upon to appear as the defender of his old leader. When I published my booklet about Laurier he wrote warmly commending what he regarded as sympathetic treatment of Sir Wilfrid's difficulties in the year of union government. It can safely be said that Sifton never consciously sought to break his allegiance to Sir Wilfrid; the breaches between them were more misunderstandings than quarrels, and it is easily believable that they would never have taken place had there been more easy and constant contact between the two men. Their failure to get along was a serious thing for Canada, since it deprived the country of the services of an administrator whose judgment and executive ability would have been of high value during years critical for the country. Personally, Sifton lost nothing in prestige by retirement from the government. When in 1886 Gladstone was, by a difference of opinion, separated from his associates and colleagues, Joseph Chamberlain, one of the seceders, said that Gladstone's strength would not be realized until he stood alone. This might have been as truly said of Sir Clifford Sifton. In parliament, following his retirement, and in the country he spoke with more evidence of effective influence than he had done when burdened with office.

Sir Clifford left a very considerable library, made up of books which he had read and valued. He was particular about his books and gave shelf room only to those that he thought worth while. The volumes were an index to his range of interests. Among them works on history, biog-



raphy, political reminiscences, economics, constitutional developments and international relationships abounded. Even in the stresses of active political life he kept up with his reading, and in his later lonelier years it was his solace. He had the mind of the student and the scholar, and he read to some purpose. Conversation with Sir Clifford, owing to his difficulty of hearing, was not a rapid interchange of comments; and in discussing a subject of importance he was apt to speak at some length upon the matter under consideration, marshalling and expanding his thoughts. The range and accuracy of his knowledge were thus revealed; particularly striking were the historic parallels which he was wont to draw to illustrate whatever point was under discussion. He was intimately acquainted with the political history of Great Britain, the United States and Canada for the past century or so; he knew it in its wide sweep and in its details. He often surprised one by his exact and extensive knowledge of United States affairs—all the prominent figures in American political history were well known to him; and it was to that country rather than to Great Britain that he used to go generally for his illustrations.

He was not given to political hero worship; he never indicated that he regarded any political leader as his exemplar. Asked once as to his opinion of Gladstone he said that he found his opinion of him rather diminished by reading Morley's life; he thought that he was not a very attractive figure as revealed in that book. He had an admiration, occasionally expressed, for Alexander Hamilton, with whose writings and achievements he was familiar; between these two men there were certain points of resemblance. He was not deeply impressed by his British contemporaries; and of Lloyd George he was sharply critical. We were both in England at the time of the "coupon" election of December, 1918; he spoke to me in terms of scorn of the

contest—the reasons given for it, the character of the appeals made, the engagements made to the electors. He charged the whole responsibility in his mind to the machinations of Lloyd George. Later he was much wrought up by the “black-and-tan” episode in Ireland; and the Chanak incident of 1922 filled the cup, so far as his feelings about the coalition government were concerned. He rarely showed himself more pleased than he was when this government fell, following its Turkish adventure. Of his Canadian contemporaries his highest regard was for Laurier; and among United States public men of his day he had a deep admiration for Charles E. Hughes, now Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Woodrow Wilson he regarded as an impractical theorist; but Charles E. Hughes rarely made a formal deliverance upon a large public issue without drawing from him a word of appreciation. On October 30, 1922, Mr. Hughes made a speech in Boston in support of Henry Cabot Lodge who was seeking re-election to the United States senate, in which he made a detailed defence of the foreign policy of the United States, for which he was responsible as Secretary of State. Sir Clifford forwarded this to me for perusal, accompanying it with a note in which he said:

“It is a most masterly comprehensive and precise exposition of the foreign policy of the United States for the last two years, and in my judgment a complete and triumphant vindication. The terse and comprehensive phraseology is a refreshing contrast to Roosevelt’s assertiveness, bump-tious, commonplace and not at all analytic; or to Wilson’s vague generalities; or to Lloyd George’s inconsequent flights of eloquence. Read it carefully and send it back to me as I wish to keep it. It is really a classic and deserves to rank as such.”

Among historical writers he seemed to give first place to Gibbon, with whose writings he made himself thoroughly



familiar in youth. He once, while in Europe, made a pilgrimage in company with young members of his family to the garden in Lausanne where Gibbon completed on June 27, 1787, his great history, after fifteen years of very strenuous labour. He recalled to them the passage in the autobiography:

“After laying down my pen, I took several turns in a berceau, or covered walk of acacias, which commands a prospect of the country, the lake and the mountains. The air was temperate, the sky was serene, the silver orb of the moon was reflected from the waters, and all nature was silent. I will not dissemble the first emotions of joy on recovery of my freedom, and perhaps the establishment of my fame. But my pride was soon humbled, and a sober melancholy was spread over my mind, by the idea that I had taken an everlasting leave of an old and agreeable companion, and that whatsoever might be the future fate of my *History*, the life of the historian must be short and precarious.”

!

The incident reveals a side to Sifton's nature that was never shown to the public. Sir Clifford's library walls, above the serried book-shelves, were adorned with a collection of large-sized portraits of distinguished Canadians or of others who had played a part in making Canadian history, for example Lord Durham and Lord Elgin. In this gallery, which represented years of patient collecting by Lady Sifton, were included all those who took part in the furthering of constitutional developments in Canada, and all the Canadian prime ministers.

When it is said that Sir Clifford Sifton had no hero, an exception might be made. There was one man whose selfless dedication to all good causes and to his fellow-men commanded his admiring devotion. But he was not a public man, nor a writer. It was to the illustrious name of Louis Pasteur that Clifford Sifton bowed his head in homage.

An attempt is made in this biography to sketch the

development and growth of Sir Clifford's views on politics, business and social relations. He came back in the end with all his freightage of experience and learning pretty much, in his general attitude, to where he was when he started out on the long journey, but with his vision broadened to take in the whole world and with a full understanding of the interdependence of nations and of social classes. He went through a period when he was a hot gospeller of the doctrines of economic nationalism; but his programmes embodying these views did not include the ideas of trade exclusiveness or national self-sufficiency. Implicit in his advocacy of national self-protection was the belief that Canada could find in Great Britain, Europe and the rest of the world, markets and customers which would enable the country to develop, without being obliged to have too close association with the United States. He had no bias against United States views, policies, methods; but they were divergent from those to which Canada subscribed, and he feared for the development of Canada along lines in keeping with her own national genius if the commercial and cultural contacts of the two countries were intimate. Sir Clifford, it may be said, outgrew these apprehensions, as he noted the solidity of the growing national structure; and during the last ten years of his life, as the details of the biography will show, he was friendly to close association between Canada and the United States in matters of common interest.

While he believed in the limitation of the powers of the state in its relationship to the individual, his was not the philosophy of *laissez-faire*. The state, by its collective agency, might properly create conditions making substantial rewards achievable by individual enterprise and capacity under terms of fair competition; and he regarded the winners in this struggle of brain and brawn, of intellect and tenacity, as making a contribution to the greatness and



prosperity of the state. The protection of property thus acquired against what he regarded as unjustifiable raids was something about which he held strong views. In his addresses dealing with the need for a remodelling of the Canadian constitution he often urged the inclusion in the new instrument of a provision akin to that incorporated in the 14th amendment to the United States constitution, by which it was provided that no state shall deprive any person of property "without due process of law." To this extent he would have restricted the present unlimited powers of the provinces to deal with property and civil rights.

Notwithstanding his bias in these matters he did not regard all fields as open to private enterprise; there were functions and enterprises which, by their nature, belonged exclusively to the state. There was, as he grew older, a progressive widening of his views as to the extent of the rights of the state in this respect, and thus we find him in the later decades of his life, the defender of the St. Lawrence River against private exploitation, the father of the regulations that protect water powers from alienation, the ardent friend of the publicly owned hydro-electric enterprise of Ontario, and the advocate of active government participation in transportation by land and sea for the correction of evils that were the fruit of private greediness. Though in theory he adhered to his earlier views that the state should have as little as possible to do with business, his practical sense condoned and approved many breaches in the theory. Akin to his views about the right of property, properly acquired and held, to protection by the state, was his belief that the right of free speech—in which he was in his own words a "fanatical believer"—did not cover the open recommendation of force as a means for bringing about change. He was in favour of drastic treatment for open advocates of revolution—punishment for citizens who relied upon force, and deportation for non-citizens who abused the hospitality of

the Canadian people. Some of the last letters he ever wrote to me had to do with this question.

In the Press comments following his death many newspapers referred to Sir Clifford as a "model newspaper proprietor", with special reference to the episode of 1911 when the *Manitoba Free Press*, of which he was the controlling owner, fought for reciprocity while he was as busily engaged fighting against it. At the time, and afterwards, there was much wonderment in certain quarters that such a thing could be. The matter is gravely discussed in the *Canadian Annual Review* for 1911, and the conclusion is reached that Mr. E. H. Macklin, the President and General Manager, and myself as Editor, were so protected by contracts that we were enabled to operate the *Free Press* without regard to his wishes. That is an explanation that is far from doing justice to Sir Clifford. Nothing prevented him from taking possession of the *Free Press* and making it serve his will but his voluntary renouncement of power, in keeping with a general understanding, which was never reduced to a formula, as to the manner in which the paper should be edited and administered. Sir Clifford's relation to the *Free Press* was never that of simply an investor; he was always deeply interested in its plans, its methods and its policies, and in time these became his first interest. But in all his active participation he never forgot his self-denying ordinance, by which he left the last word upon policy to those responsible for the conduct of the paper. The *Free Press*, to his mind, must be the champion and advocate of the West's interests; and the final judgment as to the nature of that advocacy he left to the parties into whose hands he had committed the charge of the paper. There lies before me as I write a letter—one of many in my possession—in which, after setting out his own views on a question then agitating the Winnipeg public, he added: "I am, however, content to allow you and Macklin to decide



upon the course for yourselves." At the very beginning of the reciprocity controversy he let the conductors of the *Free Press* know by letter his views and his intentions; and when he was advised, likewise by letter, that the *Free Press*, in keeping with its avowed principles and its convictions, would support the reciprocity agreement, he accepted the situation without question. During that long drawn-out battle I heard from him directly only once, when he wrote requesting that full publicity be given to a manifesto which he was about to issue. On the morning following the crushing defeat of the Laurier Government I got a good-natured, "jollying" telegram from him. Thereafter we resumed the old relations, and the intimacy was never again broken. In 1917 the *Free Press* was a bit swifter than he was to proclaim the need for union government; and during the stresses of that period he sometimes commented humorously upon the troubles into which we had led him. At a critical moment in the struggle for union government, when the prospects were of the blackest, he wrote: "Keep up your courage. I am rather following you in this, but you are right and I'll back you all the way."

In a letter <sup>1</sup>written to his son Harry, on February 9th, 1929, two months before his death, in which, deeming it "wise to prepare for eventualities", he gave what proved to be final instructions about a number of things. He indicated his desires, in the matter of his newspaper properties, in these terms:

"Finally with respect to your newspaper properties, when great prosperity comes I adjure you not to regard it as a spending fund to spoil yourselves and ruin your families. Regard it as a sacred trust to buttress and strengthen these properties, and enable you to hand them down as a great and powerful influence for the good of Canada. In time of prosperity prepare for trouble. Follow the policy that I have followed."

<sup>1</sup>A facsimile of this letter will be found in the last chapter in the book.

At the annual meeting of the *Free Press* company, following hard upon Sir Clifford's death, it was my privilege to make a statement for inscription upon the company's permanent records; and this it may be fitting for me to quote here:

Mr. Dafoe said that he wished to express, on behalf of the shareholders, their sense of the irreparable loss which the company had sustained in the death of Sir Clifford Sifton. Though he had never identified himself in matters of detail with the management, he had been in large measure a factor in the making of the business and editorial policies which had proved so acceptable to the patrons of the newspaper. Sir Clifford's wide experience as a man of affairs, and his remarkable powers of analysis and examination, fitted him in an exceptional degree to be counsellor and consultant; and he had always been available in these capacities, placing his time and talents freely at the disposal of the institution.

Mr. Dafoe said that he might speak with more particularity about Sir Clifford's contribution to editorial policy-making. When he took over the editorial control of the paper twenty-eight years ago, he had spent a couple of days in consultation with Sir Clifford upon the matter of general policies. Sir Clifford laid down the guiding principle that the *Free Press* must make the interests of its constituents its first concern. It was to be a steady, fearless and consistent advocate of the rights and interests of western Canada with due regard to the larger interests of all Canada. Those in actual charge of the paper were to be the judges of what those rights and interests were, and of how they were to be advocated; the responsibilities were theirs and with these responsibilities there went the corresponding and necessary powers.

"This did not mean," Mr. Dafoe continued, "that Sir Clifford was indifferent as to what the *Free Press* policies were. He played a great part in making them, in two ways—by suggestion and in consultation. I think I might say that with respect to all the large issues of the last thirty years, in one capacity or the other, the *Free Press* had the benefit of his services. It was my custom, when the respon-



sible parties were approaching a decision as to policy with respect to some large issue, to send Sir Clifford a memorandum of the essential facts with all available data, and ask him to turn the matter over in his mind and give us the benefit of his judgment. In these cases he invariably made an intensive study of all the facts, and gave us in brief and clear cut terms an opinion which was of the greatest value. The range of his knowledge was so great and his power of penetrating to the kernel of an intricate question so remarkable, that his views always threw a strong and penetrating light on the most intricate subjects. But he always played the game with the men in charge and on the spot. He gave us the best of his mind and his thought, but the decision was ours and ours was the responsibility. In a letter which I received from him within a month of his death he suggested a certain course on a matter of some moment, 'If,' he said, 'you can find it in keeping with your conscience to take it.'

Sir Clifford had a natural talent and aptitude for journalism; and his views as to the proper course for the *Free Press* to take in its relation to political parties and public issues were marked by insight and moderation. Even when he was immersed in active politics, he did not care to see the *Free Press* too ardent in political advocacy; he preferred for it an attitude somewhat detached and independent of party considerations. His instinctive feeling always was that in what seemed to be a conflict of interests between the public and any lesser organization, the public was right and should be supported. Upon one occasion the *Free Press* defended a railway corporation against a public demand which did not seem reasonable to it. Sir Clifford was somewhat perturbed about this; and upon being satisfied that the course taken was not in reality against the public interest, he observed that if he were running a paper his policy with respect to corporations would be to let them defend themselves when they were right, and to go after them when they were wrong. It might perhaps be in order to note that in the prolonged campaign carried on by the *Free Press* for the restoration of the Crowsnest Pass rates, for the extension of these rates over the National Transcontinental railway to Quebec, and

for reduced rates on lake and ocean shipping, Sir Clifford associated himself closely with the editorial direction of the paper; and particularly in relation to the movement for some measure of control over water rates contributed a series of notable articles to its columns.

"It is a source of melancholy pleasure to us," said Mr. Dafoe in conclusion, "to know that Sir Clifford got a large measure of pride and satisfaction out of his association with the *Free Press*. When he became interested in it, it was a small and struggling newspaper, with not much hold upon the public regard; its steady development to its present position was a continuing source of gratification to him. Writing to me within ten days of his death, Sir Clifford said, 'The *Free Press*, as you know, is my greatest interest in life.' That, at the last, this should be Sir Clifford's feeling about the *Free Press* of to-day, which represents the outcome of many years of sympathetic co-operation between himself and the management and shareholders, must be to us an occasion for satisfaction; and an occasion also for resolving that now that he is no longer with us there will be no letting down of the high standards of public service which he helped to fix."

I have written this introduction in the first person because this has the better enabled me to say some things which needed to be said. In the book proper I trust I have not, in the judgment of my readers, obtruded myself unduly. It was not possible to keep myself entirely out of the picture for reasons that will appear to my readers. During the last twenty-four years of life, and in increasing measure during the closing years, I was the correspondent to whom he wrote with the greatest frankness about political matters, and about his motives and purposes; this I learned when his correspondence and data was placed at my disposal for the writing of this book. With very few exceptions the letters quoted, to which names are not applied, were written to me.

This introduction, like most prefaces, is in fact an after-



word. It is therefore in this paragraph that I say my final word about the life and the achievements of Clifford Sifton. I have sought in this work—not very successfully I know—to give the record of his life as a story full of dramatic and moving incidents. The humblest life is a drama far beyond the power of imagination to reproduce or of art to record; and the inadequacy of the written word to give a living picture of such a man as Clifford Sifton, with his many-sided nature, his varied gifts, his activities in many fields which gave colour and movement to his life, is only too apparent to the man who has attempted the task. But I trust that the story herewith told, given sympathy and some powers of imagination on the part of the reader, may make the real man, as he walked through life, understandable to his contemporaries, and to those in later generations who may be interested in studying the records of the most formative period in the history of their country. Every human life is a two-page ledger; the contrasting records must be appraised and a balance struck if justice is to be done. If thus appraised, Sir Clifford Sifton's life can be safely left to the judgment of his own generation and of posterity. Of Lord Durham, his biographer, Chester New, wrote: "He was not that Utopian monster, a man without a prejudice"; and of Clifford Sifton it could be said that in common with his foes and his friends he had his full share of human weaknesses—he was subject "to pangs of nature, sins of will, defects of doubt, and taints of blood." These are our common inheritance from the dark past from which we derive. But every sentient forward-looking human being, as he sails his bark over "life's incognisable seas," has some star by which he steers his craft; and however he may be deflected from his track by the storms and tides, he comes back to it and follows it until the anchor falls in the predestined port. Clifford Sifton's star was pride in

Canada and a desire to serve her; and with the long voyage over and the accounting done, who will say that he was not faithful to his vision and that he did not bring rich gifts to the land he loved?

JOHN W. DAFOE.

Winnipeg,  
August 28, 1931.





CLIFFORD SIFTON  
IN RELATION TO HIS TIMES





## CHAPTER ONE

### ENTRANCE INTO PUBLIC LIFE

"It was my fortune to start public life at a very early age and I was accustomed for many years to address audiences, composed of people who were much older than I was, on public affairs. For years I was very much engrossed in administrative duties and was called on to go out from time to time to fulfil calls for public speaking. This feeling that I was addressing people who were much older than myself persisted for a long time after the facts justified it." *Sir Clifford Sifton to Queen's University, 1927.*

#### I

ON July 11, 1888, the voters of Manitoba chose a new legislature. The Liberal government, Thomas Greenway premier, which had come into office the preceding January, upon the disintegration of the Conservative administration, was returned to power by the election of thirty-three supporters out of a total membership in the House of thirty-eight. The campaign leading up to this triumph was upon the whole uneventful; and the result had been foreshadowed by the election by acclamation of all the Ministers and several of their supporters. For the moment the Conservatives of the province, leaderless and discredited, were disorganized and powerless. But here and there, where conditions were favourable, they fought desperately for local victory. Thus in the constituency of North Brandon, newly created at the redistribution which preceded the election, the Conservatives were hopeful and combative. In their candidate they had, as they thought, the coming leader of the Conservative party. W. A. Macdonald was a lawyer of Brandon, in his early thirties—one of a group of

some half-dozen young lawyers who, since Brandon appeared on the map some eight years before, had hung out their shingles in the new, ambitious, bustling town.<sup>1</sup> In that group there were one future provincial premier, three Dominion cabinet ministers and two judges. Mr. Macdonald was regarded locally as perhaps the first in this band of aspiring lawyers and politicians—in those days on the frontier law and politics were inseparable. Ardent, ambitious, ready and vigorous on the platform, marked out as everyone believed for a political career, Mr. Macdonald was so formidable as candidate that his friends counted his election as assured—an opinion which was secretly shared by many Liberals, as they looked about for some champion capable of entering the lists against him.

Early in the campaign, in the friendly Brandon fire-hall a few Liberals got together to talk over the North Brandon constituency situation in preparation for the coming nominating convention. Where could a candidate be found? Names were considered, discussed, rejected—they were not good enough, it was decided, to meet Macdonald with any chance of winning. As the list of possibles, under this scrutiny, reached the vanishing point, one of the gathering, Charles Whitehead, had an idea. "I believe," he said, "that young Clifford Sifton would make a good candidate for North Brandon if we could get him to run." There is an immediate response to this suggestion; one of the party is despatched to ask him to come to the meeting; and in five or ten minutes—for distances are short in the little city—Clifford Sifton steps into the fire-hall and into history. He is the youngest of the band of Brandon lawyers noted above. He is in his twenty-eighth year; for

<sup>1</sup>W. A. Macdonald was elected to the Manitoba Legislature for Brandon City in the election of 1892. In the Dominion election of 1896 he unsuccessfully contested Brandon constituency in the Conservative interest against D'Alton McCarthy. He afterwards removed to British Columbia, where he was appointed to the Supreme Court Bench.



six years he has been practising law in the town; he is solicitor for the City Council; his voice has already been heard in the pitched battles of oratory which marked all political contests. A young man of admitted promise; but not regarded by the local directing political junta, in view of his youth, as immediately available, until the problem of finding somebody who can match up with W. A. Macdonald sharpens their perceptive faculties.

In this first tentative overture to public life Clifford Sifton displayed, in full measure, the characteristics which were to distinguish his whole public career—promptitude in decision and directness in action. When the reason for summoning him to the meeting had been stated he made answer in a single sentence that, if the Liberals of North Brandon tendered him the nomination, he would accept it. Whereupon he turned about and went back to his office and his briefs.

In the brief chronicles of that time there is nothing but the most casual reference to the battle of the two young lawyers in North Brandon. It was fought upon the lines dictated by the frontier sense of sportsmanship. Every night they met at a country school-house or in some shed or hall in a hamlet and there engaged in high debate with one another upon the issues of the day, to small but deeply attentive audiences. Political combats were the preferred drama of the frontier; and the homesteaders and villagers deemed the nightly clash between the young champions the best of entertainment. By day the candidates followed the prairie trails in their buckboards, interviewing the electors, stirring up the faithful, tightening up the organization and wrestling with the infidels. The Liberals were overjoyed with their young candidate. Not only did he develop at once a speaking mastery, but in the canvassing of voters and in the organization of his forces he revealed the resourcefulness and the tirelessness which were afterwards so conspicuously displayed in wider fields.

A young English immigrant, hired man on a North Brandon farm, recalled many years afterwards the impression which Sifton, as campaigner, made on him. After hearing him at a joint meeting with his adversary which lasted, in the fashion of those days, until one o'clock in the morning, Arthur Hawkes, the immigrant in question, discussed the merits of the candidates and their causes with a farmer named Browning. "He was," said Mr. Hawkes, "an Englishman of education and experience. I was only a youngster, but had been to good schools; was interested in reading and public affairs; and we discussed the speeches critically. We agreed that Sifton was in a class by himself; that his speech was full of facts, most clearly expressed and without a trace of unfairness; and showing a grasp of affairs which would inevitably raise him from provincial to national politics. From so young a man Browning had never heard so impressive a speech."

On July 11 when the ballots were counted, Sifton was victor by a majority of 42.

## II

Of young Clifford Sifton, victor in North Brandon, on the threshold of a remarkable political career and of the shaping influences which have brought him to this door to the future, something fittingly may here be said.

His bent and aptitude for politics are readily explained. John Wright Sifton, his father, came to manhood in the fifties of last century; and like thousands of other young men in Upper Canada he saw in George Brown a political leader worthy of everything he could give in the way of service and devotion. There was in the political mentality of these George Brown Liberals, as they were called, a moral fervour and a note of high austerity which, accompanied not infrequently by remarkable capacity for "practical politics", made them natural political leaders in their



communities. John W. Sifton in his business life filled many parts. He was a private banker; an operator in the Petrolia oil fields; a builder of railways; a farmer; a public servant and a newspaper administrator. But there were two causes that at all times outranked every personal interest—politics and prohibition. After his removal to Manitoba in 1874 he was able to give a full measure of service to both these causes. He served two terms in the Legislature, the second as the first representative for Brandon, following the extension of the province westward in 1881; was for a term speaker in the Legislature; and in 1886 was the unsuccessful candidate in a hard fought battle in the constituency of West Brandon. As head of the temperance organization he carried on a never-ending campaign against the bar, and at one time, mainly through his efforts, the western half of the province was as “dry” as it could be made by the Canada Temperance Act.

The Siftons originally came from Ireland. The first member of the family, known to his descendants, was an under-officer in the army of William of Orange who after the campaign of 1690 was given land in the neighbourhood of Clonmel, Ireland, and became a member of the British garrison in Ireland. There are grounds for believing that the original spelling of the name was Sefton and that the sergeant in King William’s army had a relationship—possibly of kinship, perhaps only of service—with the north of England family which owned and still owns the Sefton estates in Lancashire. The descendants of this original Sifton were for more than a century gentry and small land-owners in and about Clonmel. No doubt they were average members of the class to which they belonged. Carefree and adventurous, they observed and honoured the code by which this dominant Irish class lived; they loved horses and racing; they rode to hounds; upon occasion doubtless they fought duels; they upheld by any method that was avail-



able the supremacy of the Protestant religion—and they were now and then pot-shotted from behind hedges by the peasantry.

John W. Sifton was born in Canada;<sup>1</sup> but as a boy he heard his father and uncles repeat the family traditions, and he had a fund of stories which illuminated conditions in the Irish countryside in the later decades of the eighteenth century. One told of the fate of a collateral ancestor who suffered from typhus and, for the protection of the family, was made comfortable in an outhouse, to which in the dead of night came a band of Whiteboys. Unable to force the door they mounted to the thatched roof by ladder, and tearing away the thatch shot him to death. A grimmer story was that of the defence of a country house by a young couple who stayed behind while the family went to church. The family returned to find the garden adorned by dead Whiteboys, with the young folks still holding the fort. This ancestral background made its contribution to the temperament and mental make-up of Clifford Sifton.

Conditions such as these were not particularly conducive to profitable husbandry, and by the beginning of last century the Siftons in Ireland were all but ruined. Early in the century two brothers, Bamlet and Joseph Sifton, left Ireland behind them and made a new start in Upper Canada, the new country to which the landless people of the older British countries were turning. They settled in the neighbourhood of London the less; and in 1819 Charles Sifton, the father, came out with the rest of the family—Charles, John, Robert, Rebecca, Maria. One child, Eliza, died on the voyage out and was buried at sea. Charles Sifton was then in his sixty-seventh year; he lived until 1842, dying in his ninetieth year. From him all the numerous Siftons now to be found in all parts of Canada, not to overlook the

<sup>1</sup>John Wright Sifton, born London, Ontario, August 10, 1833, died Winnipeg, September 19, 1912.

United States, are descended.<sup>1</sup> John Wright Sifton was one of the seven children born to Bamlet Sifton. He was born in London township August 13th, 1833; in 1853 he married Kate Watkin, also of Irish Protestant ancestry. Clifford Sifton, his youngest son, was born March 10th, 1861, at Arva, near London. He was two years younger than his brother Arthur, whose career was hardly less remarkable than his own.

From 1875 onwards, John W. Sifton's interests were centred in the new frontier province of Manitoba. He built for the Canadian government the section of the Canadian Pacific Railway—which until 1880 was a publicly owned road—from East Selkirk to Kenora; and he also constructed the government telegraph line from Winnipeg to Fort Pelly. In 1881 he began farming on a large scale in the neighbourhood of Brandon. Clifford Sifton thus became a westerner at an early age. He returned east, however, for his college education; and in 1880, at the age of nineteen, graduated from Victoria College, gold medalist in mathematics and valedictorian of his class. One of his class-mates was his elder brother Arthur. The two brothers, then as later, were contrasting types; they both had the secret of success, but each had his own technique. Clifford's industry was untiring, unflagging; in later years when he had risen to greatness his contemporaries were somewhat in the habit of saying that they had predicted his success from his exceptional devotion to his studies. A class-mate, Mr.

<sup>1</sup>On August 10, 1927, a monument to the memory of Charles Sifton and his wife Rebecca, erected by their descendants, was unveiled in the cemetery of the United Church at Birr, near London, where they and many other members of the family are buried. Sir Clifford Sifton was to have made an address upon the occasion; but in his absence his place was taken by his son Harry. Part of the inscription reads: "To the memory of Charles Sifton, 1752-1842, and his wife Rebecca Wright, 1769-1843, natives of Tipperary, Ireland, settlers of London township in 1818, from whom all in America of that name are descended. Interred here 1842-43." A mile away from the cemetery is the little village of Arva, now known as St. John's, where Arthur and Clifford Sifton were born.



Justice Masten, has written of him: "His honour course at college was in mathematics, and he won the 'Prince of Wales' gold medal as the best man of his class. The method, logic and orderly character of his public speeches had its origin partly in this mathematical training and partly in the natural bent of his mind. His mind was a somewhat rare combination of the intellectual or academic, and practical sagacity." One of his college activities was to assist in founding the undergraduate newspaper *Acta Victoriana*, of which he was the first business manager.

Arthur did not give his contemporaries occasion, on the same grounds, to foretell his future. There was a saying in the college—a facetious exaggeration of course—that one brother was never absent from lectures and the other brother was never present. Yet in his career Arthur achieved the dignities of Chief Justice of Alberta, Premier of Alberta, member of the Dominion Government, and representative of his country at the Paris Peace Conference.<sup>1</sup>

At twenty-one, Clifford Sifton was admitted to the Bar of Manitoba; he began at once the practice of law in Brandon as partner with his brother in the firm of Sifton and Sifton. The little town was well supplied with lawyers; in a district which was just beginning to emerge from bald prairie to a state of primitive farming there was not much litigation, and little opportunity for the commercial practice of law. There was therefore no great rush of business to the firm of Sifton and Sifton. He once told a friend that in his first year of practice he made \$428. "And I lived on it, too," he added. But the young man found

<sup>1</sup>Arthur L. Sifton, born St. John's, Middlesex Co., October 26, 1858; elected member Council of North-west Territories 1899; member of Territorial Government 1901-1903; Chief Justice North-west Territories 1903; Chief Justice Alberta 1905; Prime Minister Alberta 1910-1917; M.P. and member of Dominion Government 1917-1921; member of the Canadian delegation to the Paris peace conference. Died January 21, 1921.



plenty to do. According to the testimony of a friend he filled in his spare time in the office by extensive reading, including the complete conquest of that formidable citadel of learning, which most people salute and pass by—the *History of the Decline and Fall of The Roman Empire*.

His earliest appearances as a public speaker were as loyal lieutenant to his father, who was in Western Manitoba the foremost lay member of the Methodist church, the head of active and persistent temperance forces bent on bringing about prohibition, and the recognized leader of the Liberals. His son, fresh from academic triumphs, alert, ambitious, competent and confident, was a valuable reinforcement to all these causes, and he promptly put him to work. The young lawyer appeared on public platforms to commend the Canada Temperance Act to the electors. The Methodist church in the sparsely settled prairie settlements drew heavily on the talents of its members, and Clifford Sifton answered the call as occasion offered, by serving as "local preacher". Naturally he threw himself without reserve into the two unsuccessful campaigns which his father fought for the Legislature in 1883 and 1886. It was in the bitterly-fought provincial campaign of November 1886, when the Liberals just missed victory, that he made the impression of political capacity which led to him being chosen as candidate two years later. It was in this campaign that Clifford Sifton introduced himself by a public address to another young Brandon man who was to be his devoted life-long friend, and his right-hand man in his political campaigns. "I do not remember," said J. D. McGregor, Lieutenant-Governor of Manitoba from 1929 onward, "that I had any association with either of them (the Sifton brothers) till Clifford made a speech at a political mass meeting. The meeting was in the open at the corner of Sixth Street and Rosser Avenue, then in the centre of the town, for there was no place else to hold it; and I still remember how struck I

was by the reserved young man who addressed it. From that day I became intimate with Clifford Sifton."<sup>1</sup>

By 1888 Clifford Sifton was well on the road to an established position in Brandon. His law business—now entirely his own, Arthur Sifton having moved out into the territories in pursuit of fortune—was growing. He was most happily married, with a young family;<sup>2</sup> and his future as a successful and substantial professional gentleman seemed to lie fair before him. It is not probable that he saw any threat to that career in consenting to represent the near-by constituency of North Brandon in the Legislature. The circumstances suggested a period of political calm, calling for no great demand upon his time and energies. He did not know when politics knocked at his door that it summoned him to set his feet on a road that was to take him far afield.

### III

The completeness of the Liberal victory in the general elections of July 1888 seemed to foreshadow a period of comparative political calm in the province. The Conservative party was for the moment wiped out; even its leader, Honourable John Norquay, had escaped defeat in his stronghold of Kildonan by a bare eight votes. The Conservative government that, after a futile change of leadership, went to pieces in January, 1888, suffered for its own sins and for the unpopular policies of the Dominion Government. There were, during the eighties, issues of grave moment between the province and the Dominion; and the situation called for a "Manitoba First" government behind which the people of the province could mass themselves

<sup>1</sup>*Manitoba Free Press*, April 18, 1929.

<sup>2</sup>Sir Clifford Sifton was married August 14, 1884, to Elizabeth Arma Burrows, daughter of H. T. Burrows, Ottawa, and sister of Theodore A. Burrows, who at the time of his death in January 1929 was Lieutenant-Governor of Manitoba. Lady Sifton died at Toronto, February 19, 1925.



solidly. The natural leader for such a government was John Norquay, who in 1878 had become premier of the province.<sup>1</sup> Had he surrounded himself with able colleagues and offered a steady resistance to Dominion policies inimical to the province he would have become the great leader of a united people. Mr. Norquay, for this role, had the ability and quite likely the inclination; but he was dissuaded from this course during a visit which he paid to Ottawa in 1882, by Sir John Macdonald, who had no desire to see his railway and land policies challenged by the government of Manitoba. Mr. Norquay, whose great abilities were largely nullified by indolence and excessive good nature, permitted himself to be persuaded that a Conservative government, in open friendly alliance with the Ottawa administration, could better effect a settlement of the difficulties outstanding than a government in open opposition. Mr. Norquay returned home; raised the party banner; forced an election on party lines; and found himself, in 1883, the head of a straight party government faced across the gangway by an aggressive Liberal opposition under the experienced leadership of Thomas Greenway, who had come to Manitoba some five years earlier from Western Ontario, where he had had a political career, which included one term in the House of Commons.<sup>1</sup>

The Norquay government thereupon found itself in a most difficult position. It got no consideration from the Ottawa government, which looked to Mr. Norquay to de-

<sup>1</sup>John Norquay, born in the Red River Settlement, of mixed Scottish and Indian blood, May 8, 1841. Held office as a member of the provincial government almost continuously from 1871; Prime Minister from 1878 to December 1887. He thereafter led the Conservative party in opposition until his death, July 5, 1889.

<sup>2</sup>Thomas Greenway, born in Cornwall, England, March 25, 1838; and brought to Canada as a child. M.P. for South Huron 1875 to 1878; member of the Manitoba legislature 1879 to 1904; Premier of the province January 1888 to January 1900; M.P. for Lisgar 1904-1908. Appointed member of the Board of Railway Commissioners. Died October 30, 1908.



fend its policies and trust for protection to the supposed invincibility of the party name. The Dominion Government continued to enforce the monopoly clauses of the Canadian Pacific railway contract. When the provincial legislature, in the exercise of its unquestioned rights, gave independent companies railway charters to the boundary, the Dominion Government exercised its constitutional right of disallowance, asserting that national railway policies must take precedence over provincial rights. When Premier Norquay went to Ottawa in 1884 to demand "better terms" for the province, by the transfer of Crown lands, carrying with him the support of a unanimous legislature, he was forced to accept a wholly inadequate compromise and to agree that it was to be a "final settlement." With these issues to exploit, the Liberals presented a formidable front; and in 1886 the Norquay government only won a narrow and indecisive victory by breaking definitely with Ottawa over disallowance. Trying to give effect to its policy of freedom in railways by building a government railway from Winnipeg to the boundary, the Norquay government in 1887 got into serious financial difficulties. In other important matters the Dominion Government proved unaccommodating; and by the end of 1887 it became evident that the Norquay government was *in extremis*.<sup>1</sup>

In an attempt to save the ship Mr. Norquay made way in December for one of his ambitious supporters, Dr. D. H.

<sup>1</sup>What Sir John Macdonald thought of the Norquay government is set out most plainly in a letter to Sir John Rose in London, dated June 25, 1887, asking him to discourage the floating in London of loans by Manitoba in order to protect Canadian credit. "The present government at Winnipeg are altogether careless of the prestige and prosperity of their province. The members of that government are all impecunious, and think only of a continuation in office." Sir John added that if the arrangements to build the Red River valley railway to the boundary, and to guarantee "the interest on four and a half millions for the construction of the most hopeless of all enterprises, the Hudson Bay Railway" were carried through, the province would be bankrupt. Pope's *Correspondence of Sir John Macdonald*, page 403.

Harrison. Two immediate defeats in by-elections, the victim in one case being a cabinet minister who sought re-election, forced Dr. Harrison's resignation in just two weeks time, and on January 19, 1888, Mr. Greenway became Premier of Manitoba. The short session which followed was marked by damaging exposures of financial and administrative negligence by the former government; and it was signalized by the abandonment by the Dominion Government of its disallowance policy. It compensated the Canadian Pacific for its lost privilege, and withdrew from a position which had long been politically untenable. With such gifts to bear to the public the Greenway government lost no time in staging an appeal to the people. In the session which preceded the election and in the election campaign itself Mr. Norquay, of the preceding administration, alone faced the music; all his colleagues scuttled ignominiously out of public life.

The ex-premier, standing up on the floor of the Legislature to meet with dignity and courage the not too generous onslaughts of his victorious enemies was a spectacle which exacted a measure of respect even from his bitterest opponents. In one of his speeches of exculpation and defence he remarked bitterly that he "stood alone on the floor of the house, deserted by those who should have been beside him", to answer for themselves the charges preferred against his administration. With the Conservative party in this state of bewildered disorganization, with the Liberal government safely in office with a majority of twenty-eight behind it in a house of thirty-eight, nothing seemed so certain as that the province was facing a period of political quietness. No forecast could have been further from the reality; for on the morrow of victory a long suppressed feud in the victorious party broke out with a violence far exceeding anything within the political experience of the people of the province. And as fate would



have it the new member for North Brandon was drawn immediately into the struggle. Clifford Sifton stepped at once into the battle; and began taking and giving blows. The incident was significant of the twenty years of active participation in public life that lay before him.

#### IV

Mr. Greenway, at the time of his accession to the premiership, was in his fiftieth year. Some nine years earlier he had been active in a colonization movement, which transplanted a large number of families from western Ontario to southern Manitoba; and settling down to farm on a large scale at Crystal city he was naturally, in view of his prominence in the community, his public experience, his prestige as a former member of the Federal parliament and his platform ability, chosen to represent the new constituency of Mountain at the election of 1883. His selection as leader of the Liberals followed, and his triumph of January 1888 was the climax of five years of steady and effective campaigning. His leadership at the moment of taking office seemed unquestioned. He had the air of a resolute and masterful man who knew his own mind and could give effect to his wishes. These appearances were, however, in some considerable degree misleading. He was well-meaning but irresolute; and, as soon became evident, needed always a first lieutenant who could make up his mind for him and execute policies. Moreover, his leadership had never been acceptable to a group of influential Liberals in Winnipeg who were in general control of the organization. At the party convention in June 1886, preceding the general election, the unacceptability of his leadership to these people had been made so plain to Mr. Greenway that he threw up the position and retired from the convention.

However, when this was reported to the convention and



it was recommended that the leadership be placed in commission, the country delegates made such a demonstration of protest that Mr. Greenway was hastily summoned from his hotel and reinvested with the purple. One of the ironies of the situation was that the country delegate who made the most vigorous speech in support of Mr. Greenway was Mr. R. P. Roblin of Carman, whom fate had in store as Mr. Greenway's most determined enemy in later years. Upon this occasion Mr. Roblin, in a speech garnished with scriptural allusions, which showed that he too belonged to the companionship of the local preachers, held that Mr. Greenway was to be supported because he had "fought the wild beasts of Ephesus," i.e. the Norquay government. Mr. Greenway continued in the leadership, but his support from the Winnipeg Liberals was cool and qualified. The leader of this group was James Fisher, K.C., who had come to Manitoba from Stratford, Ont., where he had been active and prominent in politics; and it was Mr. Fisher whom the anti-Greenway Liberals at this time had in mind when they thought of an alternative leader.

The people of Manitoba, sullen and angry over the enforcement of railway monopoly, looked for relief in two directions—northward to Hudson Bay, and southward to the United States' boundary. A road to the Bay was the favoured solution, since railway charters to the boundary were systematically destroyed by the Dominion's exercise of its powers of disallowance. The Hudson Bay railway company was organized in the early 'eighties to build a road to the Bay. Hugh Sutherland, president of the company, displayed extraordinary persistency and resourcefulness in promoting the enterprise; he was prepared to play any kind of a political game if it served this purpose. Elected a Liberal M.P. in 1882, he became a virtual supporter of the Conservative government in order that the enterprise might not be prejudiced. In the Manitoba pro-

vincial election of 1886 the Norquay government was saved from immediate overthrow, because at that time forty miles of the Hudson Bay road were being built north-westward from Winnipeg by virtue of an arrangement between the government and the company. In the Dominion elections of 1887, Mr. Sutherland unsuccessfully contested Winnipeg as an Independent, his platform being the immediate construction of the road. As it became evident in 1887 that the Norquay government was staggering to its fall, Mr. Sutherland and his associates became active in their friendliness towards the Liberals; and participated effectively in the by-election campaign of January 1888 which destroyed the government. When Mr. Greenway took over the reins he found Mr. Sutherland sitting on the door-step, awaiting information as to what the province would do for his enterprise. But he was not alone. The Manitoba Central people were there too, on the same errand.

The Manitoba Central company had been organized a year or so earlier to build lines westward and to the boundary, there to connect with the Northern Pacific. Their charter was disallowed, whereupon the Norquay government stepped into the breach and undertook to build the road to the boundary itself. The Manitoba Central had an arrangement with the Norquay government whereby they would lease the line when completed at a five per cent. rental. Mr. Greenway had not actually taken office before he was importuned to confirm this agreement and, further, to agree to the company building an extension of the line westward to Portage la Prairie with a subvention of \$8,000 per mile. They asked for a letter which they could show to their principals who were, they explained, the officials of the Northern Pacific railway. Mr. Greenway gave them a letter which indicated friendly consideration for their project; it was accepted by them, as they subsequently claimed, as the granting of their demand.



Mr. Sutherland also wanted a letter; and got it a little later (March 29). In this letter Mr. Greenway recounted the legislation enacted by the Manitoba Legislature in 1886 and 1887, giving first a guarantee of bonds for \$4,500,000 for the construction of the Hudson Bay road, and afterwards a guarantee of the interest on these bonds for a period of twenty-five years. To this statement of fact Mr. Greenway made this addition: "Mr. Sutherland is well known here in connection with this great enterprise as a gentleman of integrity and ability." Mr. Sutherland departed for London markets with this letter, intent upon raising funds.

About this time Mr. Greenway's colleagues—especially Mr. Joseph Martin, Attorney-General—began to take note of the activities of these railway promoters. There was a stock-taking and a survey of the situation. The province had barely 150,000 population; it had no natural resources; limited sources of revenue; the Dominion subsidy was, in relation to the necessities of the province, insignificant. A decision was reached that a policy of caution with respect to these commitments must be followed. Mr. Greenway wrote no more letters; and when parties interested in these railway enterprises approached him for encouragement and sympathy they found him a skilled practitioner of the arts of evasion and procrastination. The main responsibility for this change of atmosphere was justly charged by the disappointed promoters to Mr. Martin. The Attorney-General was pugnacious in disposition, disagreeable in manner, strong in his likes and dislikes, outspoken in his views, imperious in temper. For personal reasons he disliked most of the principals in both camps of promoters; and furthermore, he believed that if their schemes were carried out the burden thus placed upon the province could not be borne. The Manitoba Central knew by June that they had no prospect of doing business with the government, their principals the Northern Pacific railway having begun negotiations over



their heads directly with the government. In July, Mr. James Ross of the contracting firm of Ross and Onderdonk arrived in Winnipeg prepared to complete the arrangement for the financing of the Hudson Bay railway on the \$4,500,000 basis; but found the Premier hesitant.

Meanwhile, the general election was proceeding with the electors in entire ignorance of what was happening. Behind the scenes there was extraordinary bitterness. The Liberals interested in the two railway schemes felt that they had been "turned down" and replaced in the friendship of the government by newer men; but they disguised their resentment and joined in the campaign for the re-election of the government. But with the election over and a legislature almost wholly Liberal, they believed that the time had come for them to have an accounting from Mr. Greenway.

On the morrow of the election a movement was begun to drive Mr. Greenway and Mr. Martin from the government, and replace them by nominees of the insurgents. The forces against the government which now began secretly to line up were formidable. They included Mr. Hugh Sutherland and his Hudson Bay following; the Manitoba Central group, including Mr. R. P. Roblin, a Liberal member of the Legislature; and Mr. W. F. Luxton, owner and editor of the *Free Press*, the Liberal newspaper. Several members of the group of Winnipeg Liberals who were critical of Mr. Greenway had been elected to the Legislature, including Mr. James Fisher. The signal for the attack was the publication in the first week of August of the terms of the arrangement made between the Manitoba Government and the Northern Pacific railway. This provided for the formation of a company to be known as the Northern Pacific and Manitoba. It was to take over the government road to the boundary, build an extension to Portage la

Prairie, and also a line through the centre of the province from Morris and Brandon. For the new lines there were subventions.

The Legislature was called for August 29 to ratify the agreement. The tactics of the insurgents were to convince the public that the contract was improvident and corrupt; and to thereby induce the Legislature to reject it. The time was so brief that all disguises had to be thrown off and the assault made in the open. Day after day the *Free Press* attacked the agreement in articles of ever-increasing bitterness. By August 10 the *Sun*, the evening newspaper of Winnipeg, declared that a conspiracy had been formed to turn the government out, and that letters had been sent out to various country members asking them to associate themselves with the movement.

In listing members of the Legislature who could, as it was believed, be counted upon to oppose the government, the directing minds of the insurrection included the name of Clifford Sifton, the young member for North Brandon. One of the prime organizers of the movement, D. J. Beaton, secretary of the Hudson Bay Railway company, undertook to deliver him to the combination. Mr. Beaton had been previously a resident of Brandon, where he had been on terms of intimacy with the Sifton family. Great hopes were based upon the expected co-operation of the member for North Brandon; his example and leadership were to make it easy for other members, especially those from the western part of the province, to ally themselves with the new movement. A letter was sent to him inviting him to associate himself actively with the revolt, and offering him the position of Attorney-General in the new Liberal government which was to succeed the Greenway administration.

Clifford Sifton not only rejected the proposition out of hand; he identified himself at once and actively with what



might be termed the counter-revolution. When the Legislature opened he moved the reply to the speech from the Throne; and in this address made a vigorous defence of the government's arrangement with the Northern Pacific. The objections to the contract were on several grounds: the government should have kept the road to the boundary as a free railway highway open to all United States' roads; equal rights should be given the St. Paul, Minneapolis and Manitoba road, the Northern Pacific's rival; if the government would not retain the road as a highway then it should accept an alternative offer made by the St. Paul, Minneapolis and Manitoba road, which it was claimed offered the country more for less money. There was criticism as well of the provisions for financing, which it was held opened the way to irregularities.

None of these objections had much merit in Mr. Sifton's eyes. Running rights had not been given the St. Paul, Minneapolis and Manitoba road because that road had been for years in close alliance with the Canadian Pacific Railway. The necessary competition with the Canadian Pacific Railway would not be obtained if the Red River Valley Railway remained under government control. "Experience had shown that rates could only be permanently lowered by free untrammelled competition of private capital against private capital, and business interest against business interest." The government's policy was in keeping with their promises to the electors, and it was the duty of the members to support them.

The writer heard Clifford Sifton deliver this maiden speech. He was familiar, from several years experience in the press gallery of the Federal parliament, with the best political speaking of the time; and he recognized at once in the performance of the tall fair young man, qualities which marked him out as having a great parliamentary future.



The orderly sequence of the arguments; the clearness and moderation with which they were expressed; the absence of surplus verbiage; the complete self-possession of the speaker—all suggested the experienced public man rather than the novice attempting his first flight.

The attack upon the government and the Northern Pacific agreement failed completely. After a discussion covering some days the agreement was ratified, five Liberal members joining in opposition with the five Conservative members. Three of the five, while not in favour of the agreement, did not make their disapproval an occasion for breaking with the government; but R. P. Roblin went definitely into opposition, and James Fisher took up the detached and critical position which he thereafter maintained in the House.

For the collapse of the drive against the government, Clifford Sifton was largely blamed by those who had hoped for its success. Thereafter he was a marked man; and they bided their time to revenge themselves upon him. There was to be for him in public life no period of obscure and peaceful apprenticeship.

## V

The Legislature, having approved the railway contract with the Northern Pacific and dismissed the Provincial auditor, on the recommendation of a special committee of investigation of which Mr. Sifton was chairman, adjourned; but the legislative recess brought no lessening of the political temperature. The onslaught upon the government by the insurgent Liberals continued with ever-mounting violence. It became increasingly evident that the spring of the bitterness was the refusal of the government to co-operate with the promoters of the Hudson Bay railway project. Their golden hour had, as they hoped, struck; but the fair pros-

pect faded as it became apparent that the government would not commit the province unreservedly to the enterprise. Looking back over the vicissitudes which attended the carrying through of this enterprise, the disinclination of the government to join hands with the promoters is seen to have been soundly based; but to them, committed as they were by all their possessions and all their hopes to the project as immediately attainable and prospectively successful, there was no explanation for this hesitation but treachery and corruption.

Once the legislature was adjourned, Mr. Sutherland and his associates proceeded to force a "show-down" with the government. Early in September letters were addressed to the government by Ross and Onderdonk, contractors, and by Mr. Sutherland, in which the situation of the company and its expectations were set out. The special deal with the company, made by the Norquay government prior to the election in 1886, had turned out disastrously for the province. By this arrangement the first forty miles of the road from Winnipeg north-westerly to Lake Manitoba was to be constructed. By building this section of the road the company would earn from the Dominion government a land grant of 256,000 acres.

The province agreed to turn over bonds of the province to the value of \$256,000, the railway transferring the earned land grant of 256,000 acres to the government as security for repayment. A road bed was put down for forty miles and rails laid; the province duly turned over the bonds and these were transferred to the contractors, in part payment of their claim against the company.<sup>1</sup> The Dominion Government engineers refused, however, to pass the road as being of a sufficient standard to earn the land grant. The

<sup>1</sup>The contracting firm was Mann and Holt. The partners in this firm were young business men destined to be more widely known as Sir Donald Mann and Sir Herbert Holt.



province was thus "out" \$256,000; and its only security was forty miles of unfinished road.<sup>1</sup>

The proposition submitted to the new government by the company was that it should accept and implement the scheme of construction as set out in the legislation of 1887. By this legislation the province guaranteed the payment of interest at four per cent. on bonds issued by the company to a maximum of \$4,500,000, contingent upon the road being built to the bay by July 1st, 1892. The promoters sought confirmation of this arrangement; given this they were prepared to put the forty miles of derelict road into a condition which would insure the transfer of the withheld land grant, and to build an additional sixty miles to the narrows of Lake Manitoba. Or as an alternative the latter extension would be made on the basis of a subsidy.

To go on with the scheme on these lines meant a contingent annual commitment of \$180,000. The total revenue of the province at this time did not exceed \$600,000, three-quarters of which came from the Dominion subsidy. The government had just entered into engagements, in furtherance of its plans for bringing in a competing railway from the south, carrying a contingent annual liability of \$80,000. It notified Mr. Sutherland that, the position having been changed by the abolition of monopoly, the capital amount upon which interest could be paid would have to be reduced to \$2,500,000—that is, \$100,000 a year.

Upon this the storm broke in fury. The state of exasperation was accurately reflected in the editorial pages of the *Free Press*, which had become very closely identified with the Hudson Bay enterprise through the appointment

<sup>1</sup>Years later Manitoba recovered this money, following the taking over of the Hudson Bay Charter by the Canadian Northern Railway Company. In 1898 the Greenway Government, in assisting this railway to build a section of its railway by which it would earn a Dominion land grant, stipulated that out of this land grant 256,000 acres should be transferred to the province. In 1904 the Roblin government accepted a cash payment of \$400,000 in lieu of the lands.



to the position of chief editorial writer of Donald J. Beaton, secretary of the Hudson Bay railway, an accomplished journalist with a wide command of invective. Warning had already been given by the newspaper that it would "denounce all opponents and obstructionists (of the scheme) as enemies of the province"; and it lived up to its engagement in this respect. Following the publication of the correspondence it said the government had "knifed this once promising scheme, this bright hope of the prairies." Mr. Greenway and Mr. Martin were charged with the basest ingratitude. For several years they had lived (presumably in a political sense) on the Hudson Bay road. They were accused of carrying on a vendetta against the promoters; of carefully planning and cautiously managing the wrecking of the enterprise. "They dishonoured the province to gratify their hatreds and jealousies." Their ejection from the leadership of the party was demanded. "They were too crooked for honest men to follow". . . . "The Liberals of Manitoba cannot afford to carry them for a day beyond the opportunity to carry them out. . . ." "Seldom", it declared, "is conduct so utterly base and treacherous as characterized Mr. Greenway's dealings throughout these negotiations revealed in real life."

Attacks upon the government for its "betrayal" of the Hudson Bay scheme were varied with charges of personal corruption against Premier Greenway and Mr. Martin, the Attorney-General, in connection with the other "railway deals". Under the heading "A Second Pacific Scandal" the *Free Press* declared that Mr. Greenway, before he decided to throw over the Manitoba Central promoters in favour of their principals, the Northern Pacific had arranged with this company to receive \$2,500 personally, and \$10,000 for political purposes. In other articles the *Free Press* suggested that Mr. Martin, in entering into the contract with the Northern Pacific, looked for personal gain.

From these charges there sprang up a fine crop of libel suits and investigations. A Royal Commission being appointed to look into the Manitoba Central charges, the newspapers making the charges declined to attend and supply evidence. There were both civil and criminal libel suits against the *Free Press*, but these had the usual fate of political libel suits. In the criminal cases the juries split; the civil suits failed or dragged on for years, finally losing themselves in the sands. But in this heated atmosphere of charge and counter charge, of insinuations and recrimination, of venomous hatred and personal vindictiveness, there took place a readjustment of party allegiance which ensured the continuance of these conditions of uncontrolled bitterness. The bolting Liberals merged with the Conservatives to form a formidable opposition.

With the early and lamented death of Hon. John Norquay in 1889, Rodmond P. Roblin, one of these Liberals, took charge, by virtue of his energy, his political attitude and the depth of his aversion to the Liberal leaders of the legislative opposition, and in due time was formally elected leader of the Conservative party. When in 1890 the Greenway government, at the instance of Mr. Martin, broke up the school system which had been conferred upon the province by the Manitoba Act and substituted for it a system of national schools, the Roman Catholics in a body also joined the opposition—not integrally but in alliance with it. This combination of Conservatives, anti-Greenway Liberals and Roman Catholics, with the *Free Press* as its journalistic champion, was so powerful that it was realized by all that the Greenway government, which had come into power in 1888 upon an irresistible tide of public favour, was in jeopardy.

At this juncture, Joseph Martin, who had been the maker and shaper of the government policies and their champion in the Legislature and throughout the province,



tendered—not for the first or second time—his resignation, to find, not a little to his surprise, that the Premier no longer regarded his services as indispensable. Mr. Martin disappeared from the government<sup>1</sup> and Clifford Sifton reigned in his stead as Attorney-General. This was in May, 1891. He had then just entered upon his thirty-first year.

## VI

The selection of Clifford Sifton to fill any vacancy that might occur in the government was assured practically from the time of his first performance in the Legislature. The impression, which he then made, was strengthened by the passage of events. Having decided, upon the issue being squarely put up to him, to stay with the government instead of joining in the anti-Greenway cabal, he was downright and forthcoming in his support. With his facility in debate, and his capacity to render clear-cut judgments, he fell naturally into the position of being, among the private members, the foremost champion of the government; and as such he came within the range of the artillery of the opposition Press.

To make answer to the Niagara of denunciation that overflowed them, following the definite breach in the party, the assailed Liberal Ministers staged a banquet at Glenboro in January, 1889. This meeting lasted all night—such was the political zeal of the audience and its capacity for taking punishment. Clifford Sifton was associated with the ministers in offering a defence. Arising at two a.m. to make a few remarks, he gave some inside facts about the representations which had been made to him the previous sum-

<sup>1</sup>Mr. Martin's later political career was notable. He represented Winnipeg in the Dominion parliament 1893 to 1896. Removing to British Columbia he represented Vancouver in the Legislature 1898 to 1903; and was premier for a brief period in 1900. From 1910 to 1918 he was a member of the British Parliament, representing East St. Pancras, a London constituency. Died in Vancouver, March 2, 1923.



mer, when his co-operation in the anti-Greenway drive was sought: as that it had been intimated to him that a bogus alternative offer to that made to the government by the Northern Pacific would be submitted by the St. Paul, Minneapolis and Manitoba (Jim Hill's road), to afford a pretext to Liberal members desiring to bolt. This statement made him the central figure in an incident later in the Legislature, and earned him a broadside on his own account in the *Free Press*. "Mr. Sifton has made a bad beginning. The incident stamps him as a young man in whom no reliance can be placed, while his utterances of the last few months show how excessively fresh he is."

During the three full sessions of the Legislature in which Mr. Sifton served as a private member, the records show him as taking an active part, both in the political discussions and in the regular business of the House. The most vigorous assailant of the government was R. P. Roblin, and it was Sifton's self-imposed and acceptable duty to reply to these attacks. Some notes from the records of these three years will suggest the range of this young member's interests and activities.

In the session of 1889 he led the resistance to a resolution, moved by Mr. Norquay, censuring Mr. Greenway for not giving evidence before the commission appointed to look into the Manitoba Central charges. To Mr. Sifton it seemed unreasonable (the House agreeing with him) that Mr. Greenway should be expected to appear when the makers of the charges themselves ignored the commission.

In a speech on the railway question he strongly approved the action of the government in bringing in the Northern Pacific, and disagreed with the suggestion that the government itself should have built the competing railway. It was better for the government to have nothing to do with the management of railways. Supporting the government's measure repealing the guarantee of Hudson Bay railway

bonds, he expressed a doubt as to whether the benefits to be desired from building the road were all that the promoters claimed.

In the remarkable session of 1890, when the Legislature enacted measures which in time created Dominion issues of the first magnitude, Mr. Sifton was a steady supporter of the government's policies. He approved the measure abolishing French as an official language, and he supported in a powerful speech the bill establishing a system of national schools. During this session the Liberals in the Legislature took notice of the campaign which their brethren in the Dominion field were waging in support of a policy of reciprocity with the United States; and gave them the moral support of a resolution of approval.

This resolution, fathered by Mr. Martin, the Attorney-General, took the form of a petition asking the Dominion Government "to take such steps as may be necessary in order to facilitate the bringing about of unrestricted reciprocity in trade between the Dominion of Canada and the United States of America." In view of Mr. Sifton's later attitude towards this question, which had such important political consequences, there is an element of historic interest in the fact of the support which, upon this occasion, he gave to this proposal. "Mr. Sifton", said the *Free Press* report, "expressed his entire sympathy with the terms of the resolution. No subject had attracted so much attention during the last three or four years as reciprocity. It must have an important influence on public opinion when a growing province like Manitoba expressed itself in favour of unrestricted reciprocity. There was a sort of international jealousy which made each party slow to make the first advance. If the passage of the resolution would hasten the day of unrestricted reciprocity and all the benefits that would follow, he would most heartily support the resolution."

But in the support of the young member from Brandon there was nothing of subserviency. This was evident in his manner and bearing and in the nature of his arguments, even when he was co-operating with the government; and it was made manifest when he took the field against legislation proposed by the Attorney-General, which in his opinion weakened the security upon which mortgage money had been loaned throughout the province.<sup>1</sup> Regarding this as a breach of trust and as certain to check the flow of capital to Manitoba, Sifton improvised an opposition, drawing recruits from all the groups in the House, and embarked upon a filibuster which was maintained with such determination that the government was forced to offer an acceptable compromise.

<sup>1</sup>"What is it that brings capital to a country? It is security and confidence that is at the bottom and which results in the influx of capital. Thirty years ago in Manitoba I sat up every night for a week fighting the government of Manitoba, of which I was a supporter, fighting confiscatory legislation. Later, when I was Attorney-General I fought the legislature again, when it sought to pass an act to abolish personal covenants and mortgages. If they had passed that it would have been worse than an epidemic of smallpox." Address by Sir Clifford Sifton to the Westerners Club, Montreal, Feb. 26, 1923.



## CHAPTER TWO

### OFFICE AND POLITICAL TRIUMPHS

Sifton was the master mind in Parliament. He could discern the current political tendencies, put his finger on the popular pulse better than any other man in my experience. His executive capacity was extraordinary.—*Laurier: quoted by Skelton.*

THE young Attorney-General took office with three pressing tasks before him—first to get himself returned to the Legislature in the face of an opposition virulent, aggressive and confident; then to put the party forces in order for the pitched battle in the constituencies, that could not be long delayed; and meanwhile to defend the validity of the school legislation under attack in the courts. The opposition, while happy to see Mr. Martin out of the government, were under no illusions as to the political effect of the change. They knew that it improved the position of the government. Mr. Martin's unregarding political aggressiveness and personal combativeness disqualified him, then as in his later experiences, for successful leadership; nevertheless, he had by these very qualities given the party an issue which, under cooler and more adroit management, made it impregnable against the assaults of its enemies.

The vote-getting possibilities of the school issue were promptly demonstrated in North Brandon where, after a brief but savage battle, the new minister multiplied his narrow majority of 1888 five times. In keeping with a tactical plan, already formulated and faithfully adhered to then and in succeeding years, of representing Mr. Sifton to the public as a practitioner of the black arts in politics, the

opposition set up, after a discreet interval, a tremendous outcry of "fraud". Carefully avoiding a contest in the courts, which would have brought out the facts, they poured out a flood of charges with affidavits—in those days no political party was rightly equipped without well-oiled machinery for producing affidavits to order—alleging all manner of enormities: defective lists, plugged lists, corruption, bribery, the use of whiskey and what not. The alleged irregularities of the North Brandon by-election were for some considerable time the text for lamentations upon the decline of political morals from the pristine purity of the preceding golden age.

Mr. Sifton accepted, with humorous resignation, the fact that he had been cast for the role of the villain of the piece by his friends of the opposition. A little later there was a by-election in Manitou, and before departing to take part in it he observed to the premier that he would feel happy if on returning he should not be accused of anything worse than highway robbery or midnight assassination. The charge was circulated and subsequently ventilated in the Legislature that he had sought to induce the Conservative candidate (who was successful in the contest) to retire by promising, in that event, to make Manitou the centre of a judicial district. In his denial to the statement, made through the Press and in the Legislature, the Attorney-General said that so far from making any such proposition, he had explicitly declined to implement a pledge to this effect said to have been given by the former government.

These charges and assaults upon the new minister were merely overtures to an attack which continued with unabated vigour as the campaign proceeded throughout the months, until polling day in July, 1892. From an inspection of the opposition Press of the period it is learned that Mr. Sifton "had a customary weakness for falsehood"; that "he is the greatest of all ministerial hypocrites"; that he is



“capable of any falsehood” to shield himself; that he is “the most slippery customer Manitoba politics has yet developed”; that he “is as vile a slanderer as lives in Manitoba”; that he “is one of the most unprincipled politicians that ever cursed Manitoba”; that he is as “accomplished a hypocrite as ever walked the prairies”. Apt alliteration’s artful aid was summoned to the attack. He was also “slick, smooth and sanctimonious.”

Checking over Mr. Sifton’s performances in the Legislature, on the platform and as administrator, as furnished by available records, the justification for the violence of the attack seems rather tenuous. He appears simply as the vigorous and resourceful advocate and defender of policies of the government—policies which while controversial had in them no quality of criminality. The effectiveness of the advocacy supplies the explanation of the vigour of the attack. As Sir Richard Cartwright observed about that time, with reference to criticisms of which he was the object in the Dominion field: “The biggest stones are thrown at the best apple trees.” The legislative preparation for the election included a new distribution of seats, to which no great objection was taken; and an amendment to the election act which provided, in effect, that an election should not be voided, for a corrupt act, unless it was performed by an agent of the candidate, or if otherwise performed it was of a character to influence the result.

The provision was almost a direct transcript from the Dominion act, but this did not protect the government from the charge that it proposed to steal the elections. There was much controversy, heated in character, over a change in making the voters’ lists, which had been made in 1891 by a bill sponsored by the then Attorney-General Mr. Martin. The Liberals, in opposition, had been committed to the support of the Ontario system of list making by which the duty of compilation was left to municipal



officials, in opposition to the conservative policy of having the lists compiled by enumerators appointed by the government. In 1889 the Greenway government brought in a measure embodying their policy, and a set of lists for the province was made. Inspecting them the government was so convinced of their inadequacy that they repealed the act, changed front entirely, and adopted in substance the methods of list making embodied in the Norquay system and the Dominion Franchise act. Imitation, though the sincerest form of flattery, was not in this instance commended, the opposition finding the powers given to enumerators, which were quite harmless when employed in making Dominion lists, capable of dangerous manipulation in the hands of appointees of the Greenway government.

The railway programme of the government included an offer to the Hudson Bay Railway Company of a cash bonus of \$1,500,000, contingent upon the completion of the line to the bay. The company by this time, however, had lapsed into a comatose condition, from which it was never to emerge; and the offer constituted only a useful debating point. The government had to explain and defend a change in the original contract with the Northern Pacific, by which the elaborate arrangements of the earlier agreement were wiped out, and the provision of a grant of \$1,750 a mile substituted. There had also to be submitted to the electors an arrangement providing for a bonus of \$150,000 to the Canadian Pacific, for the extension of its Souris branch to the coal fields, contingent upon the company agreeing to deliver coal at fixed prices at specified distances from the pit mouth, and upon the coal company making itself a party to the understanding. This arrangement, though made before he entered the government, embodied a policy of which Mr. Sifton approved and which he applied, in later years, to the solution of problems with which he had to deal.

The government had a good showing with respect to provincial finances to submit to the people, showing economies in operation, reductions in expenditures and increased public grants. And above and beyond all these it had the question of the School act which from the day it came into the public mind showed a tendency, which finally proved irresistible, to swallow up all other issues. With this array of weapons and appeals the Liberal party of Manitoba, with Thomas Greenway in high command but with Clifford Sifton as the man behind the gun, moved into the Electoral battle of 1892.

## II

The Manitoba school question descended upon the public of Manitoba in the late summer of 1889 out of a clear sky. Indirectly, it may be said to have been derived from the controversy in the Dominion Parliament over the refusal of the Dominion Government to disallow the act passed by the Quebec Legislature, making compensation to the ecclesiastical authorities for the confiscation of the Jesuits Estates act early in the nineteenth century. This episode completed the breach between the Conservative government, headed by Sir John A. Macdonald and D'Alton McCarthy, M.P., the latter of whom had long been the most distinguished member of the party outside the ranks of the government itself. Freed from party restraint, Mr. McCarthy began to give free expression to his convictions—or prejudices if you will—about the use of French as an official language, and the existence in some of the provinces of state-aided separate schools; and going to Portage la Prairie in August, 1889, he there, in the presence of Joseph Martin, Attorney-General in the Greenway government, set out his views upon both of these subjects, suggesting that there was work to be done in dealing with both these issues.



~~X~~ Mr. Martin, speaking later, showed himself in sympathy with Mr. McCarthy's views.<sup>1</sup> He definitely announced that the government would abolish the dual language system and he used guarded language which was at once interpreted by the public as foreshadowing drastic action with respect to the Manitoba school system. This was news to Mr. Greenway, the Premier; and to Mr. Martin's other colleagues, especially to James E. P. Prendergast,<sup>2</sup> who was the special representative of the French-speaking minority in the government. It was news to the public too; but the popular response to the interpretation which it put upon Mr. Martin's statement was so prompt and so sympathetic that it immediately became evident that here was an issue that, having been raised, could not be side-tracked or ignored.

The government, minus Mr. Prendergast, who went at once into opposition accompanied by four other members who had been elected as government supporters, made these issues its own and at the next session of the Legislature submitted measures abolishing French as an official language and providing for a national system of schools.

This statement of the origin of the school issue conflicts with a theory which was current in Manitoba while the controversy raged and behind which considerable documentary evidence was assembled. In pursuance of their policy of trying to make Mr. Greenway and Mr. Martin personally odious the government's assailants charged them with personal trickery and falsehood, through the breaking of pledges

<sup>1</sup>Mr. McCarthy, when addressing the Dominion government on March 7th, 1895, in the proceeding arising from the appeal of the Manitoba minority, disclaimed credit for having started the fire. He said that Honourable J. A. Smart, Minister of Public Works, had made a definite announcement of policy on the school question at Clearwater three days before he spoke at Portage la Prairie. But an inspection of Mr. Smart's speech shows that while he foreshadowed economies of administration in the education department he made no attack upon the dual educational system.

<sup>2</sup>Mr. Prendergast was appointed to the Manitoba bench in 1897 and became in 1929 Chief Justice of the Court of Appeals.



given by them—by Mr. Greenway to an ecclesiastical representative of His Grace Archbishop Tache before he took office in January, 1888, and by Mr. Martin to the electors of St. Francois Xavier in the critical by-election of that month. Upon a motion put forward in the Legislature in the 1892 session for an enquiry into the charge that Mr. Greenway had given these assurances—which he denied—Mr. Sifton subjected the claim to an examination upon the lines of the higher criticism, in which he showed the extreme improbability that anything of the kind had or could have happened. The accusation implied that the Catholic schools and the French language had been under fire by the Liberals, and that their hostility to these institutions was a matter of common knowledge. Mr. Sifton pointed out, what was indubitably the case, that there had been no public discussions whatever of these matters in the election campaign of 1886 or subsequently in the House or in the country.<sup>1</sup>

As for the charge that Joseph Martin had made formal pledges—which he also denied—in the St. Francois Xavier election in the same month, January, 1888, the writer of this book has substantial reasons of a personal character for regarding it as not well-founded. Reducing the various statements to a single narrative it appears that the claim made was that A. F. Martin, a French-speaking Liberal member of the Legislature who had charge of the Liberal campaign, summoned Mr. Joseph Martin to the constituency to give assurance that the separate schools would be preserved and the French language respected;

<sup>1</sup>Mr. John S. Ewart, counsel for the Roman Catholic minority, is a witness to the accuracy of this statement. Addressing the Dominion government on March 7th, 1895, in the case of the appeal of the Catholic minority he said: "There was not a man in Manitoba who knew that there was a grievance with reference to separate schools. We did not hear a word about it. No political party, no politician, no clergyman, so far as I know, said a word about it. The first word, so far as I know, was spoken by my learned friend Mr. McCarthy." That was in August, 1889, more than eighteen months after the alleged pledges were given.

and that Mr. Martin gave these assurances at two meetings, at "Le Petit Canada" school house and at the school house at St. Francois Xavier. At the meeting at "Le Petit Canada", it was further stated, Mr. Norquay put the case for the minority before Mr. Martin categorically and secured from him the most explicit engagements.

The writer's reason for doubting the accuracy of this statement is that he accompanied Joseph Martin to the meeting at "Le Petit Canada" (whither it is true he had been summoned by Mr. A. F. Martin); heard the discussion, and reported the speeches at length for the next following issue of the *Manitoba Free Press*. In that report there is no reference to schools or the French language, for the very good reason that no speaker mentioned them. Mr. Norquay did not catechize Mr. Martin on these subjects. He did charge the Liberals in general terms with having an anti-French policy. Specifically he said that under the scheme of redistribution set out in the Liberal programme the French representation in the House would be materially reduced. He quoted an editorial in the *Free Press* in which it was pointed out that while the French constituencies had an average population of 870, the newer constituencies to the west were five times as populous. This point was further stressed by Dr. Harrison, the new Premier who had succeeded Norquay; he suggested that French representation should be on some basis additional to population and area. He charged Martin with having expressed anti-French sentiments.

To these statements Martin entered a general denial. There was, he said, no plank in the Liberal programme which was anti-French in character; and no speech of this character had been made by any member of the opposition. The opposition believed in fair play to all sections of the province and to all nationalities. This was the extent of the charges made and of the assurances given. There was



no reference whatever to schools. Two years later men anxious to score a point against the government, recalled Mr. Martin's assurances and gave them a range and particularity not warranted by the text. Memory is one of the least reliable manifestations of the mind; it is the handmaid of will and desire.

To the legislation abolishing the dual system of education, as to the bill destroying the French language, the objection could be justly urged that the government had no warrant from the people and that its course had been decided after inadequate consideration. Both measures wounded the minorities in their tenderest feelings; and they were drafted and driven through the House by Mr. Martin in a spirit lacking in all elements of conciliation or consideration. But while much could be said against the methods employed it is beyond doubt that, at least as regards the School Act, the overwhelming popular sentiment was that the school system, which had been imposed upon the province in 1871 by influences in the east, should not be continued. If in 1871 the Manitoba school system had been modelled upon that of Ontario—public schools, with provision where they were regarded as desirable, for separate schools—there never would have been a Manitoba School question.

But the expectation and the hope in 1871 was that Manitoba would be a second Quebec; and by the action of the first Legislature, responding to outside pressure, the province was fitted out with two sets of denominational schools—Roman Catholic and Protestant. The Roman Catholic schools became church schools in the strictest sense of the word, with the state committed to supporting them by subvention and by putting at their disposal the powers of taxation. The Protestant schools having to serve the children of many denominations of necessity became public schools. "There never was in the Protestant schools



under the old system," wrote the Anglican Archbishop of Ruperts Land to the Prime Minister of Canada, in February 1895, "any instruction properly to be called Protestant."

Manitoba was settled chiefly from Ontario; and irritation of the settlers at a school system which, in the sparsely populated districts, made it impossible to unite all elements behind a common school, was general though it did not become vocal until Mr. Martin gave a lead. The principle avowed by the School Act of 1890 was that the State should supply a national non-denominational system of schools; and that to these schools alone public money, whether in the form of legislative grants or funds raised by taxation, should be paid.

To the principle of state control of education, set out in the bill, Clifford Sifton from the outset gave his strong, consistent, unwavering support. With his ancestry, upbringing and convictions no other course was possible for him. When the School bill came before the House in March, 1890, he spoke strongly in its support. To Mr. Roblin's observation that the Manitoba Liberals by supporting the bill would find themselves in new relations with the Dominion Liberals he replied that, since they believed the bill to be founded in justice and equity, they would not hesitate if adherence to it carried them into new political relations. He argued, soundly as the events proved, that the province had the legal power to abolish denominational schools; and he denied that there was a moral obligation upon the province to protect these schools, on the ground that they represented the confirmation of a treaty right. There could not in any case be a treaty right between the Crown and the subject; and in this instance the bill of rights presented to Ottawa in 1870, upon which the claim rested, was fictitious in that it had not behind it the approval of the convention which had in the first place set out conditions of union.

In view of the traditional unchanging attitude of the Roman Catholic church upon the question of education, the Manitoba School Act, once it became operative, could not escape challenge both in the political and the legal field. Between the views of those who think education is the prime concern of the State and the teaching of the Church there is an unbridgeable chasm. To quote again from Archbishop Machray's letter to Sir MacKenzie Bowell in February 1895 — "The schools (those established under the Manitoba School Act) are not satisfactory to Roman Catholics, but the reason is that no schools can be satisfactory to them that are not taught by teachers of their own communion and that do not give religious teaching according to the requirements of the Church."

Immediately the measure became law it was attacked in the courts: and by a petition from Archbishop Tache and Roman Catholic citizens of Manitoba seeking its disallowance by the Dominion Government, on the ground that it was oppressive and unconstitutional. The action in the courts, *Barrett v. Winnipeg*, took the form of an application to quash the by-law levying taxes on Roman Catholics for national schools; Judge Killam in October 1890 found the law good, and this, upon appeal on the ground that the school law was *ultra vires*, was confirmed by the Manitoba Court of Queen's Bench by its judgment of February 2nd, 1891.<sup>1</sup> Thereupon an appeal was taken to the Supreme

<sup>1</sup>"I take the question here raised to be merely that of the liability of all property holders to be subjected to equal taxation for the support of free non-sectarian public schools which may be used by such as choose. The right to immunity from such taxation was not, under the original Confederation Act, generally established throughout Canada in favour of any class or classes; and if intended to be established here, one would have expected this to be indicated by more distinct language than is found in the Manitoba Act. Such immunity was general here before the union and not in any way existing in respect of denominational schools, or in favour of any class or classes: the denominational schools did not, by law or practice, enjoy any recognized right or privilege to be kept free from any kind of competition. The burden is naturally upon those who seek to limit the power of the legislature to choose from time to time, as



Court at Ottawa. In March 1891, the Dominion Government, replying to a petition of the Roman Catholic hierarchy urging Federal intervention, suggested that the matter stand until the courts had their say.

This was the situation when Clifford Sifton became Attorney-General of Manitoba in May 1891. The Manitoba School Act had still to run the gauntlet of the courts, with no assurance that it would remain effective even if the courts upheld its validity, since the Dominion Government in its reply to the petition of the Archbishop had clearly suggested that, even in that case it might exercise a right of intervention, as ultimately it did. Henceforth, it was the task of Clifford Sifton to defend the School Act in the courts and in the political and constitutional lists; and it was in the discharge of this duty that he attracted the attention of the people of Canada and became an outstanding national figure.

### III

The provision of the law which was relied upon in challenging the validity of the School Act was sub-section I of Section 22 of the Manitoba Act, which set forth that in laws in relation to education made by the Manitoba Legislature, "nothing shall prejudicially affect any right or privilege with respect to denominational schools which any class of persons had by law or practice in the province at the Union." Mr. Prendergast, in a memorandum to the Lieutenant-Governor of the province, put the argument in

circumstances change, between a sectarian and a non-sectarian system of public school education, or its exercise of the sovereign power of taxation in order to afford education free, if it thinks it necessary or advisable in the interests of the province, to any greater extent than is naturally involved in the language of the constitution. I am unable, therefore, to hold that the Public Schools Act, if enacted at the outset of the union, would have been *ultra vires* in establishing this system of schools and in authorizing the taxation complained of, without establishing or providing for the support of separate schools for any class."—*Mr. Justice Killam's judgment, November 24th, 1890.*



a sentence. The sub-section, he held, "recognized the law or practice followed prior to the Union, as a source of indefeasible rights and privileges with respect to denominational schools." The essential facts were not in dispute. Before the union there were in the Red River settlement denominational schools, maintained by the Roman Catholic, Anglican and Presbyterian churches; and though admittedly there was no legal authorization for them, the words "by practice" were held as protecting the rights of the denominations to their own schools, following the union, to the exclusion of any over-riding system of national schools.

In October 1891 the Supreme Court of Canada by unanimous judgment held that taxes could not be collected from Roman Catholic ratepayers for national schools, thus knocking out the School Act. The next move in the legal game of chess was institution of an action by Alexander Logan, to have the courts declare that ratepayers belonging to the Church of England could not be levied upon for taxes for public schools; and the Court of Queen's Bench, in the light of the judgment of the Supreme Court, had no difficulty in so finding. Thereupon, the Manitoba government took a direct appeal to the Privy Council, and *Logan v. the city of Winnipeg* was bracketed with *Barrett v. the city of Winnipeg* for a common hearing and judgment. If it was to be found that the Roman Catholics were entitled by law to their own schools, it would be established at the same time that the Anglicans had the same right; in that event it would be equally clear that the Presbyterians would also be exempt from contributing to the support of State schools.

This intervention on behalf of the Anglicans was regarded as inspired by the Attorney-General. "The purpose", said the *Free Press* "was, anticipating defeat before the Privy Council in the Barrett case, to create all the confusion possible in school matters in this province in the hope

that the Catholics would be blamed for it." The affair, it declared," was the work of three conspirators, Sifton, Howell and Perdue"—the two latter, H. M. Howell and W. E. Perdue, both future Chief Justices of the Province, being legal advisers to the government. In the Legislature, Mr. Sifton in answer to a question replied that the suit was brought "with the consent and practical assistance of the government but not at its instance"—which may be rightly interpreted as a diplomatic explanation of an act, political in its inception and intention.

The School Act had been resisted in its passage through the Legislature by the regular opposition<sup>1</sup> and by the six French-speaking members, under the leadership of Mr. Prendergast. With the latter group this was a matter, of course, of deep conviction; to them the legislation was a violation of the sacred rights of the minority. To the regular opposition it was a question of expediency. As the election date approached the Conservative members began to discover virtues in the national school system; and in the session of the Legislature preceding the voting, Mr. Sifton had the unexpected experience of having to defend himself against an accusation that he was not showing sufficient zeal in the defence of the School Act. He had to explain that great care had to be taken in arranging for the appeal. "There was not a member of the legal profession here who had had anything to do with the conduct of an appeal from the Supreme Court to the Privy Council: so it would seem there was some need for care and circumspection." There would be, he said, no delay in pressing the case to a conclusion.

In May the Conservative party, formulating their election policy in convention, came out definitely for national schools; and further bound themselves, in the advent of an

<sup>1</sup>Established by the fact that on the third reading they all voted against the bill.



adverse finding by the Privy Council, to seek an amendment to the constitution that would place complete control of education within the power of the province. It was thus planned to pocket the Greenway government between, on the one side, the enraged minority seeking its life, and on the other the regular Conservative party free to outbid it in its appeal to ultra-Protestant sentiment. Upon this disposition of forces the battle opened.

Mr. Sifton was the chief campaigner for the government, and in every one of his many speeches he put the school issue squarely up to the electors. He questioned the bonafides of the Conservatives in view of their vote against the School Act; and pointed out their political alliance with French members who, in the event of the government defeat, would expect and demand the repeal of the Act. "If the law is repealed, separate schools will be fastened on us again and will stay with us until we die." There was a chance to decide this question once for all. He treated with scorn the suggestion that an amendment to the constitution could or would be obtained. "There was a belief in the mind of the government that the Legislature had power to deal with the School question. They are still of that belief; and it did not follow, even if the Privy Council maintains the Supreme Court holding, that separate schools would be restored. The question is whether or not we have power to tax Roman Catholics for the support of public schools. The position of the government is this, that no grant shall be made to any sectarian school in this province.<sup>1</sup>

The campaign was marked on both sides by a good deal of sectarian bitterness and appeals to religious prejudice. Thus a well-known Liberal in an appeal issued over his own name, wanted to know whether Manitoba was to

<sup>1</sup>This summary report is compiled from Mr. Sifton's speech at Carberry May 4th, 1892, as reported by the *Carberry News* and from the report in the *Virden Advance* of his later speech at Virden.

be controlled from the Vatican, or by her own people. "Every vote cast against the present government is on the side of Popery and the reactionary scheming of a foreign priesthood." But no such note was sounded by Mr. Sifton during the whole bitter campaign; while inflexible in his policy, he was moderate in his advocacy of it. All the contemporary records, the friendly by their compliments and the critical by their strictures, bear testimony to the immensely effective character of the appeal which, on this issue, he made to the electors of Manitoba.

#### IV

It was Clifford Sifton's performance in the Manitoba general election of July 1892, supplemented by his generalship in the midwinter campaign of 1896, that created what might properly be called the "Sifton legend" in Manitoba—a legend of courage, resourcefulness, endurance, sagacity and prowess. There are a hundred tales which will be told as long as there are survivors of the conflict of the 'nineties, about Sifton's part in these battles—tales of tactics and strategy, of pitched battles on the platform, of the perfection of an organization based upon the fanatical devotion of followers to commanding leadership, of the charm of a comradeship far outranging the ordinary associations of politics. J. D. McGregor, Lieutenant-Governor of Manitoba, who was very closely associated with him in these campaigns, in a tribute to Sir Clifford paid at the time of his death bore testimony to his capacity for leadership: "Young men rallied to him. His ability was so obvious he was a mile ahead of any of us. That sheer ability took him to the front. He was never what you would call a 'good mixer', but was genial and entirely at his ease among his intimates . . . He did not seem to know how hard he worked. His capacity for work seemed more than endurance could bear. If he were engaged in an election his



energy, his knowledge of the situation, his grasp of details, would far exceed that of anyone else. It wasn't that he was so strong physically, but he exercised the will power to strain his constitution to any extreme lengths he wished. I have seen him (in the provincial campaign of 1896) come off the train at Brandon at eleven at night, get a few of us together at his home, sit up all night, have us to breakfast and then, in the dead of winter, start out in the sleigh to deliver speeches at Souris in the afternoon, Hartney at night, and drive across to Oak Lake, where he would catch the train back again. All he needed was to pull the buffalo robe around him to sleep in the rig."<sup>1</sup>

Sir Clifford himself regarded these contests as the school in which he had proved his mettle and learned the art of practical politics. They bulked larger in his memory and affections than more noted achievements on a wider stage. One of the things he thoroughly learned was that there was no substitute for intimate personal contacts with his constituents as a means to victory. Urging at a conference of candidates, the need for hard personal work in the approaching elections of 1896, he said that if any one would give him the name of an elector in North Brandon he could tell him the colour of that elector's hair.

In his later years he was often in reminiscential mood if in congenial company; but it was not of the triumphs of his great career that he loved to speak. He was soon in full tide of humorous, picturesque, narration of the brave days of old; of how they foiled the best laid plans of an opposition determined to unhorse the Greenway government in 1892; of spirited and lively joint meetings in little country towns; of ambushes into which unwary opposition campaigners were lured; of the virtues and the worth of comrades of those days who marched and fought with him. His deepest affections and his tenderest memories went back

<sup>1</sup>*Manitoba Free Press*, April 18th, 1929.



MRS. CLIFFORD SIFTON  
On her wedding day





to the beginnings of his career, and there were no friends of whom he spoke with such intimacy and affection as those of his youth. Within two months of his death the writer had the privilege for the last time of spending several days in Sir Clifford's company, and it was to these times, and these days, and these memories, that his talk soon turned however the conversation might start.

Of the issues of the campaign of 1892, apart from that arising from the school question, little need be said. There was in them nothing of great current importance; and they have long since been forgotten. But a fight is a fight whatever it is about; and to the people of Manitoba this battle of the hustings gave two months of thrills and excitement. The meeting of handpicked partisans served with addresses cooked for their tastes, which is now a political institution, did not exist in the Manitoba of those days. The people wanted a combat, not a eulogy of party virtues; and the party champions, to get a hearing or make an impression, had to meet their adversaries face to face on the platform in the presence of an audience, divided in sympathies and keyed up to the last pitch of expectation. A public meeting thus had in it something of the duel with possibilities of verbal counterparts not only of parry and thrust but of the *coup de Jarnac*. A definite score on the platform, such as the catching out of an opponent in some contest of opposing assertions, or a telling characterization, not only had a decisive immediate effect on the meeting but tended to pass into the mythology of the district.

There were star performers on both sides in these head-on platform collisions in the 1892 campaign; but it was scarcely open to question that the champion, around whom public interest most readily centred, was the young Attorney-General. He was a new man in the lists; there was something stimulating in his youth and his keenness for battle. His style of speaking was also attractive to the



people. This style was the natural expression of the mental processes by which he attacked and conquered problems. First, he had a mastery of his subject—he knew it from end to end in all its strength and weakness. Out of this knowledge he talked clearly and directly. There was always in his manner something of the business executive setting forth the particulars of his management to his principals. He always assumed that his hearers were reasonably intelligent, were interested in the public matters under discussion and were capable of following a closely reasoned argument. His intellectual power to sort out facts, appraise their worth and put them in proper relation to one another was accompanied by a singular felicity of presentation. Here was clarity of mind served by clarity of expression. The age of rhetorical bombast in public speaking was not at that time over, but the young Brandon lawyer built his speaking style upon no conventional model. There were in his speeches no supposedly funny stories; no purple patches; no elaborate ill-fitting allusions; no attempts to be crudely facetious at the expense of his adversary; but a crisp, direct attack upon the question before the audience sometimes in a vein of ironical humour but, save in very rare cases, in terms of considered moderation. He had a high temper and a vocabulary to match; but these were not for public demonstration. He once discussed his idea of the utility of public speaking in some such words as these: "When on the platform my desire was to put up a case in such terms that next day or perhaps next week, some hearer of mine working in his fields would say to himself: 'Now about that point of Sifton's—I don't see that there can be any answer to it.' " This is not so far removed from Arthur J. Balfour's statement that the object of public speaking is to induce the mind to open long enough to enable some thought to be dropped into it which later may fructify.

In the campaign of 1892 Sifton ranged over the whole

province and "took on" in turn in public debate all the experienced jousts of the opposition. There were notable encounters which attracted wide attention; at Carberry, where he met R. P. Roblin, the leader of the opposition, and N. F. Hagel (both noted platform performers); at Virden where a Sifton-Hagel clash furnished entertainment to a great audience; at Brandon where he and T. M. Daly, M.P. (a little later to be Minister of the Interior) had their differences out in the presence of their fellow townsmen; and at Crystal City where, after travelling all night and a day, he turned up at a Conservative public meeting to make a fighting and effective defence of Mr. Greenway, (the candidate for Mountain constituency) against the onslaught of Mr. Robert Rogers, his Conservative opponent, assisted by Mr. Roblin. The race in Mountain was nip and tuck between the veteran Liberal leader and the youthful aspiring Conservative (for whom the future held a remarkable political career); and there was a current belief that it was this spectacular intervention by Mr. Sifton which saved the seat for the Liberals. A whiff of the heated party atmosphere of these meetings can still be got from the old files of the local newspapers of those days which, partisan to the core, always saw to it that the other side got the worst of it in the reports. Thus, from the report of the Sifton-Daly duel in the *Brandon Sun* (then a Liberal paper) one learns that Mr. Daly had a terrible time at the hands of his youthful antagonist. It appears that at one stage in the encounter Mr. Daly "sat with crimson face and twitching hands"; a little later he "squirmed on his seat"; again, "his countenance revealed that he would have given dollars" had he left a particular question alone. And so forth and so on. Those were the days of real sport in politics!

On July 23rd the electors voted; and the Greenway government was returned to power by a substantial majority. Among the rejected were Mr. Roblin, Mr. Hagel and Mr.



Rogers, who had led the assault upon the government. There was general agreement that the onslaught of the powerful opposition combination failed because the electors proposed to take no chances in the matter of the National School System.

## V

Space will be taken to tell in some detail the story of the remarkable struggle between the province and the Dominion which ensued when the school issue escaped from the courts and entered the larger political arena; but an additional note or two must first be made of Mr. Sifton's relation to other matters of political or administrative interest which arose during the remainder of his term as a provincial minister.

There was for instance the thorny question of prohibition—which brought trouble a-plenty to the Greenway government and especially to the Attorney-General. Was he not the son of John W. Sifton, the outstanding temperance leader of the province? Had he not in the most public and outspoken manner identified himself with the temperance cause? Had he not told the Legislature that he was a temperance man, that he did not know the taste of liquor and trusted under God he never should? The faithful sons of the temperance lodges looked for the early and complete destruction of "the traffic," and were not partial to explanations of why the thing could not be done.

At that time there was going on a province-wide tussle between what would now be termed the "wets" and the "drys". In every village in the province there was a tug-of-war between those who wanted facilities for drinking, in the form of a bar-room in the local stopping place, and those who were resolute that there should be no such facilities. Temperance sentiment was strong enough to put difficulties in the way of securing licenses. Local option by-laws, if carried, could make whole municipalities dry. In



places of less than two thousand population a license could not be granted unless sixteen out of the twenty nearest householders were favourable. In spite of these limitations the country-side was pretty well peppered with bars. In 1887 there were two hundred and eighteen licenses in force (reduced by 1891 to one hundred and fifty-six).

The temperance forces were organized in every locality, and these local lodges were linked up in a provincial organization. They wanted prohibition; and they looked to the government to meet their demand for it. Pending the achievement of their hopes they applied pressure in every possible way open to them, and cherished dark suspicious as to the integrity of the license department and the intentions of the government. Every liquor case in the courts was followed with a jealous eye, and failure to secure a conviction or to maintain a conviction upon an appeal was likely to be regarded as proof of a secret alliance of the government with the traffic. Thus the Attorney-General in May 1892 receives a letter from John Greenway of Crystal City in which he is informed that if a liquor conviction in a certain case, which has been appealed, is quashed this will be regarded as proof of government interference or neglect; in which case the Liberal temperance electors of that district will either vote against the government in the election then coming on or abstain from voting.

The Liberal candidate in the constituency is Thomas Greenway, brother of the letter-writer and premier of the province; but this does not lessen the severity of the judgment—in fact Mr. John Greenway says he suspects that Mr. Thomas Greenway has been interfering in this very case. Mr. Sifton writes a hot denial; says that Mr. Greenway has had no connection with the case; declares that the case has been properly defended and is now at the disposal of the courts. And he closes his letter in these terms: "I am quite unable to understand how the temperance people

of your locality hope to advance the cause of total abstinence and prohibition by electing Mr. Robert Rogers instead of Mr. Greenway. If the temperance people who are Liberals in your part of the country wish to defeat not only the government but the people who are in favour of temperance legislation, and have given it most clear and distinct proofs of their desire to advance it, the best way they can do that is to follow the course you suggest—either to stay at home or vote for Mr. Rogers.” This incident was typical of the Spartan attitude of mind of the Liberal prohibitionists.

Just before the election of 1892 a delegation representing the temperance organizations waited upon the government, and asked that at the elections a plebiscite be held on the question of prohibition. They said the vote was desired for the purpose of finding out where the temperance question stood in the minds of the people. Later, a bill providing for this plebiscite was brought in by a private member, was given support by the government, and became law. Speaking in support of the bill Mr. Sifton said that, in view of the uncertainty as to the powers of the province, “Even if a large majority of the people were in favour of prohibition, this Legislature could not take immediate action until it was seen that the jurisdiction was in the Legislature.” But when the vote showed a large majority for prohibition (for, 18,637; against, 7,115) there was a demand for the immediate enactment of prohibition; and the further claim was freely made that the government had engaged itself to pass such legislation, given a substantial affirmative majority. The government was kept busy during the first session of the new legislature in denying that it had made any such engagement, and in explaining why in view of this indication of popular opinion it did not proceed to enact prohibition.

The discussion culminated in the submission to the Legislature by Mr. Sifton, in his capacity of private member,



of a memorial to the Dominion parliament, graciously transferring the problem to the federal body. The memorial recited that the electors of Manitoba had voted by a large majority in favour of "a law totally prohibiting the importation, manufacture and sale of intoxicating liquors," in the province of Manitoba; declared it to be the duty of the Legislature to take steps to secure legislation carrying into effect the opinions of the electors; expressed doubts as to the power of the province to enact total prohibition, and confidence that full legislative power in this respect rested with the Dominion; and therefore called upon the Dominion to pass a law "prohibiting the importation, manufacture and sale of intoxicating liquor as a beverage in or into the province of Manitoba," promising to supplement it if necessary with provincial legislation.

This memorial was supported by much the most elaborate speech made up to this time in the Legislature by Mr. Sifton. After a very lengthy argument he reached the conclusion that only an act of complete prohibition would meet the wishes of the people of Manitoba. "They did not want several things in one, two or three acts of parliament, but absolute prohibition of every description of liquor." Such an act was, in his judgment, beyond the power of the Legislature. A partial prohibitory act, which might be within the power of the province, could not be enforced. "You cannot regulate anything of the kind but must make it totally outlawed, and the only kind of prohibitory law that can be enforced is a law that prohibits and makes it unlawful to have, to make or to import it." Such a law he believed could be enforced. "The traffic will die out of itself because every self-respecting citizen will respect the law."

Such a law could only be passed in the first instance by the Dominion Parliament; let it then be put up to that parliament to deal with the question. The argument to the Legislature seemed irresistible; it passed the memorial with



but a single dissenting voice; and it was forwarded to Ottawa, where it was received without acclamation and entombed in silence. It was never heard of again. Ottawa had troubles of its own!

The prohibition question remained in Manitoba politics, and was a factor in defeating the Greenway government in 1899. The Conservative party promised to bring in prohibition; and the Hugh John Macdonald government fulfilled this pledge with the Prohibition Act of 1900, with the remarkable provision that it was to be regarded as valid only to the extent of the powers of the province. This act was promptly done to death by the succeeding Conservative government, by means which it is not within the scope of this work to describe. Complete prohibition (in theory) did not come to Manitoba until there was in 1919 legislation both at Ottawa and Winnipeg, thus covering the whole field. This was in effect a confirmation of the soundness of Mr. Sifton's views as expressed in 1893.

## VI

As Attorney-General and law officer of the crown Clifford Sifton was alert and competent. A number of measures dealing with the courts for the purpose of increasing their efficiency, were passed during his term of office. The most considerable constructive act of this character was one abolishing the division between law and equity procedure in the Court of Queen's Bench, and codifying and simplifying civil procedure.

At that time there were two courts, Law and Equity, administering justice in different ways, under different rules by different officials, but by the same Judges. As was then said, the curious spectacle was presented of the Court of Queen's Bench, by its injunction, restraining proceedings in the Court of Queen's Bench, the Chief Justice on Monday awarding an injunction to restrain the Chief Justice from

doing injustice on Tuesday. These incongruities had long been abolished in England and Ontario by the passing of the Judicature Act. Mr. J. S. Ewart, in the *Manitoba Reports* in 1884, had aptly described the situation as follows:

“What reason could ever have been assigned for the existence, side by side, of a court of equity and a court of law. . . .? No law giver, however inventive, could devise such an anomaly. . . . If a court is to be intrusted with the administration of justice it would *a priori* appear irrational to erect another court to enjoin its proceedings when its jurisdiction appeared to be inadequate. The obvious course would be to invest the original court with the requisite power to do ample justice in all cases within its jurisdiction. In Manitoba the constitution of the Court of Queen’s Bench, most unfortunately, became the work of able lawyers . . . . imbued with the system in which they had been trained. If some intelligent Indian had been Attorney-General he would have constituted the court and told it to hear both sides and do justice giving it full power to do so.”

Mr. Sifton dealt with these anomalies by the Queen’s Bench Act, 1895, the Judicature Act of Manitoba. It was first introduced to the House in 1894, having been previously distributed to the members of the profession. It met with a great deal of opposition from those imbued with the old principles, on the ground that it would add to legal expenses and law-costs generally, and it stood over for a year. The measure as enacted was not much changed from the original draft. The Act made a complete change. A writer on legal matters commented at the time upon the work of the Attorney-General in these terms: “There is sufficient legislation to justify a certain claim to originality, and whatever the Attorney-General may hereafter do in his official capacity, he has at least shown commendable zeal and diligence in attempting to render justice more easily attained and to perfect the remedies for the attainment of same. This code will undoubtedly be the basis of civil procedure in this Province for all time to come.”



As law officer Mr. Sifton kept a watchful eye on all manner of private legislation and saw that it conformed with the legal proprieties, as he regarded them. In his attitude towards all these matters there was nothing of immaturity, or uncertainty and, it may be added, nothing experimental or rash. He had already developed a political philosophy which brought him well within the definition of "Whig" as given by Bagehot: "Certain men of a cool moderate, resolute firmness, with a clear view of the next step and a wise intention to take it; a strong conviction that the elements of knowledge are true, and a steady belief that the present world can, and should be, quietly improved." His temperament and his historical reading had made him doubtful of legislative short-cuts to better things; men must work out their own salvation by their own capacities, through available agencies; it was for the state to see that conditions under which these individual activities were carried on were as fair and favourable as the state could make them. Direct participation by the state was not excluded, but it must be controlled by caution and prudence.

In his first speech in the Legislature he had denied that the province could best achieve its purpose of ensuring railway competition by building a competing line: he was for what he called "free trade in railways" with, where assistance was given, a definite understanding of the benefits to the public that would be secured by the subvention. The arrangement with the Canadian Pacific Railway for the Souris extension, though it antedated his connection with the government, was a good illustration of what he regarded as sound public policy. The railway got help to build the road. The country profited by the development of a backward section of the province; and by a specific engagement by the railway to supply coal at reduced prices specifically set out in the schedules. This was good business, in Mr. Sifton's judgment.



There was at that time a popular pressure which in time was to lead to experiments by all the prairie legislatures, to protect farmers by legislation against themselves in the matter of paying too highly for their credits. Propositions of this kind coming before the government or the Legislature had to run the gauntlet of a critical examination by the Attorney-General. In the summer and autumn of 1892 there was a very determined drive to force legislation forbidding farmers to give lien notes on their growing crops or chattels. The business interests of Winnipeg, as represented by the Board of Trade were actively behind the proposition. Mr. Sifton was sceptical and cautious; and he voiced his objections in a letter to a friend in the country who had urged him to give the proposed measure his support:

"I may say that my study of the question and questions of this kind have led me to the conclusion that there is very little use in endeavouring to protect farmers from the effects of their own contracts by Act of Parliament. I believe that in the long run the safe way to treat people is upon the assumption that they are free men and capable of deciding for themselves what contracts, and the kind of contracts, they should make. Attempts to edge them about by artificial legislative restrictions are almost always entirely ineffective, and lead to far worse evils than the temporary difficulties which arise, in the way you have indicated, in a hard year."

"I sympathize with the difficulties, but I don't think that the method you suggest, and which is now being pressed by the Board of Trade here, would result in accomplishing the desired end . . . all experience goes to show that if a man is liable to make a foolish contract or bargain, he will make it in some way, no matter how many Acts of Parliament are passed to prevent him. It may be hard to learn the lesson, but farmers, like other men who do business, will be obliged to learn by experience how to do their business. I don't say this, as you will no doubt understand, from any lack of sympathy with the difficulties, but in legislation it is necessary to observe general principles which are the result of experience gathered from other places."

In this case the pressure was so strong that the Attorney-General had to yield a point. At the next session of the Legislature he brought in a bill prohibiting the registration of lien notes, etc., in registry offices. He said, supporting it, that the Board of Trade wanted the legislation to go much further than this; but he felt that the government must not prevent a man making an agreement with regard to his chattels. It was, however, within the power of the government to say that certain classes of paper should not be turned into registered liens to the disadvantage of a class which required protection in this respect. The courts were still open to creditors, so that no injustice would be done in that direction. The incident is typical of Sifton's attitude upon all questions of this character, and is here recorded because of its illustrative value.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE DEFENCE OF THE NATIONAL SCHOOL SYSTEM

"Separate schools for different elements in the population deepen and extend the sense of difference because of their emphasis on distinctiveness of race, history, language, literature, religion and culture. On the other hand the school that is common to all stresses the present and the future rather than the past and emphasises the matter common to all, such as present life interests."—*Professor E. A. Ross (University of Wisconsin)*.

"The Honourable member talked about compromising. Surely he must be blind to history when he spoke of compromising with the Church of Rome, whose educational system was as enduring as the seven hills of the eternal city. Rome never compromised, but pressed on and on until she had as much control of education as she could get. He had no desire to act unjustly to any section of the community, and no one was worthy of being called a man who would not accord religious freedom to all; but he supported the national school system because he believed it was in the best interests of the whole people of the province. It was with this conviction that the government had determined to maintain the rights of the province and to fight the case to the last ditch."—*Clifford Sifton in the Manitoba Legislature, February 28th, 1894.*

#### I

FOLLOWING hard on victory at the polls on July 23rd, 1892, came victory in the courts. On July 30th, Joseph Martin, who had been retained by the province in a legal capacity, sent this cable from London to Clifford Sifton: "Strong judgment in our favour, adopting our arguments and controverting Supreme Court on every point. Congratulations on double event."

The judgment of the Judicial committee of the Privy Council, delivered by Lord Macnaghten, was a complete vindication of the claim that the provisions of the Manitoba Act in no way limited the legal right of the province to make



over or change the educational system at will. The Privy Council found that there was no dispute as to the facts. Before the union there was in force in the area comprised within the province "no law or regulation or ordinance with respect to denominational schools." Therefore no rights by law existed.

There were, however, "denominational schools, some of them being regulated and controlled by the Roman Catholic Church, and others by various Protestant denominations." These schools were supported out of the funds of the church, supplemented by fees. The right or privilege to maintain schools of this character upon this financial basis existed after the union. But "it would be going much too far to hold that the establishment of a national system of education upon an unsectarian basis is so inconsistent with the right to set up and maintain denominational schools that the two things cannot exist together, or that the existence of one necessarily implies or involves immunity from taxation for the purpose of the other." In short, the denominations could continue their schools if desired; the province was free to establish a national school system. As for the "grievance" upon which the demand for Dominion intervention was based, their Lordships said:

"But then it is said that it is impossible for Roman Catholics, or for members of the Church of England (if their views are correctly represented by the Bishop of Rupert's Land, who has given evidence in Logan's case), to send their children to public schools where the education is not superintended and directed by the authorities of their church, and that, therefore, Roman Catholics and members of the Church of England who are taxed for public schools, and at the same time feel themselves compelled to support their own schools, are in a less favourable position than those who can take advantage of the free education provided by the act of 1890. That may be so. But what right or privilege is violated or prejudicially affected by the law? It is not the law that is at fault; it is owing to religious con-

victions, which everybody must respect, and to the teaching of their church, that Roman Catholics and members of the Church of England find themselves unable to partake of advantages which the law offers to all alike."

With this judgment the school question passed into its second movement, in which it became essentially a struggle between political powers, though much of the manoeuvring was done behind the camouflage of supposed constitutional obligation. From the outset the Manitoba minority looked for rescue to the Federal authority. The School Act was assented to on March 31st, 1890; ten days later Archbishop Tache, on behalf of the Catholic section of the Board of Education, presented a memorial to the Dominion Government asking for the disallowance of the act. This was followed by a petition from opposition members of the Legislature asking for such relief and remedy as might seem just.

The Dominion Government, which was itself looking forward to a critical election, marked time; but in March 1891, the election being over and the government safely returned to office, and the period in which disallowance could be exercised being about to expire, a petition signed by twenty-five Archbishops and Bishops of the Roman Catholic Church, headed by the Cardinal Archbishop of Quebec, recited the scope and effect of the Manitoba School Act and asked that a remedy be afforded to this "pernicious legislation in the most efficacious and just way." There still remained ample time in which to disallow the act. The Dominion Government, forced to make a political decision, decided not to use the weapon of disallowance, but to await the finding of the Courts as to the validity of the act. Should the courts find the act good law it would then be necessary, said Sir John Thompson, Minister of Justice, in a report which the government adopted, to consider the petitions under those sections of the Manitoba Act which provided in certain cases for an appeal to the Federal Government.



When the situation thus foreseen arose, no time was lost in calling upon the Dominion Government to fulfill its engagement. On September 20th, 1892, a petition was presented to it signed by Archbishop Tache and over four thousand members of the Roman Catholic Church in Manitoba, asking the Dominion Government to entertain the appeal and make the necessary provisions for the relief of the Roman Catholics. A second petition bearing date October 31st, 1892, was more specific in its requests. It asked the Dominion Government to declare that the School Act did prejudicially affect the rights and privileges with regard to denominational schools, which Roman Catholics had by law or practice at the Union; and to provide that the school law repealed in 1890 should be re-enacted to the extent that was necessary to re-establish these rights and privileges.

The Dominion Government was thus faced with a prospect which, to many of its members, was threatening and disagreeable. By this time the people of Canada were aware in a general way of the Manitoba school question. It was known that the province had abolished separate schools and had brought in a system of non-sectarian national schools, and that its legal right to do this had been affirmed by the highest court in the realm. It was also known that the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church had publicly called upon the Dominion Government to intervene and destroy this law. Some members of the Government, especially those representing Ontario constituencies, knew quite well that to do this on the strength of provisions in the constitution quite unknown to the general public would be a proceeding dangerous and probably fatal to the government and to their own political lives. For ten years previously the Orange and ultra-Protestant elements in the provincial Conservative party in Ontario had been agitating for the abolition of the Ontario system of education, which provided



for public schools with separate schools where there was sufficient support for them, and its replacement by a system of national non-sectarian schools; they could hardly be expected to consent to the destruction in Manitoba of the very educational system which they sought to establish in their own province.

After much anxious weighing of the advantages and dangers of conflicting courses the Dominion Government decided to postpone the day when it would have to make a decision, by asking the courts to decide whether, in view of the decision of the Privy Council, there was still the right of appeal under the provisions of the Manitoba Act and the British North America Act.

The political advantages of this course were apparent. The courts might hold that the appeal could no longer lie, in which event they would be well rid of a dangerous issue. In any case, the discussion would familiarize the public with the fact that the Dominion had under the constitution certain powers of intervention in provincial educational matters. Perhaps if the courts found these powers still intact they might give the Dominion, in case it had to intervene, a colourable claim that its intervention was an obligation of the constitution instead of a necessity of politics. Therefore let the reference to the courts proceed. In January, 1893, the Manitoba Government was advised that this was the course which the Dominion intended to follow.

The Manitoba Government realized from the beginning of the school controversy that it would not be enough to get a verdict in the courts. One of their effective arguments in the election campaign of 1892 was that in the event of attempted intervention by the Dominion they could be relied upon to put up a stout resistance. Looking forward to such intervention one of their most effective pamphleteers wrote: "Are the men who are the present opposition candidates likely to resist the encroachments of the Dominion Govern-

ment? The present local government can, of course, be relied upon to do so, and this is one of the reasons why they should be sent back to office with an overwhelming vote."<sup>1</sup>

As the preliminaries to intervention were being carried on, the Manitoba Government ran up the flag "No Surrender" and stood on guard. When Manitoba was advised that the question of the competency of the Dominion Government to hear an appeal was to be submitted to the courts, the reply was sent to Ottawa that the province was not interested and would not be represented. Upon Mr. Prendergast in the Legislature accusing the government of apathy in its indifference to developments at Ottawa, Mr. Sifton said that if Manitoba rights were infringed upon, the government would so act that they would be accused of something very different from apathy.

Upon a motion by James Fisher that the province abandon the national school system, replacing it with the dual system of Ontario, he made a more specific statement of government policy. There was not the slightest probability of adopting the course suggested. The Government would stand by the principles of the school act as long as it existed as a government. The government would recognize no distinctions of race or creed, and grant no special privileges to any class. The government did not admit that it had treated the Roman Catholics with anything but tolerance and equal justice. Speaking for himself, personally, he had nothing but good will for Roman Catholics.

In July, 1893, the Dominion completed the case which it proposed to submit to the Supreme Court. It embodied six questions which in their totality fully covered the question of the competency of the Dominion Government (or the Governor-General in Council, to use the official title) to hear the appeal and grant redress. The case was argued

<sup>1</sup>*National Schools for Manitoba.*—F. C. Wade.



in October. Manitoba declined to plead, but Christopher Robinson, Q.C., upon nomination of the court appeared in the interest of the province. Judgment was rendered in February, 1894. Every conceivable answer to the six questions appeared in the judgments of the five justices, but on the essential question as to competency three of the judges held that the appeal could not be heard; and the case then proceeded to the judicial committee of the Privy Council, the appeal being taken in the name of some twenty citizens of Manitoba, representatives of the minority.

There was further discussion of the school question in the Legislature during the session of 1894. Mr. Sifton, replying to a speech by Mr. Prendergast, expressed his doubts as to whether the School Act would ever be amended by the Federal authority. If it ever were changed it would be by the Legislature of Manitoba. He felt no desire to persecute any section of the community, and had endeavoured to make the working of the act as easy as possible so that there should be no cleavage between any classes in the community. Mr. Prendergast should not forget that if his compatriots did not get their fair share of the school grant the renunciation on their part was voluntary.

During this session the provisions of the School Act were tightened up in an important particular. Certain school districts, with the co-operation of the municipal Councils, had been continuing to function as denominational schools, simply foregoing the receipt of the Provincial grant. Mr. Sifton explained that he was satisfied this action was illegal; but it was simpler to make the law explicit than to throw the matter into the courts. This amendment, Mr. Prendergast said, would close up more denominational schools than the act of 1890.

The watchful hierarchy at once demanded the disallowance of this act, and this request having been transmitted to the Government of Manitoba for their observation



drew the reply, that as the law was undoubtedly within the legal competency of the Legislature, disallowance would be an unjustifiable attempt to interfere with the functions of the Legislature and would be resisted by every constitutional means. This reply, characterized in a further ecclesiastical petition to the Dominion Government as "disloyal and fallacious" was apparently effective; nothing further was heard of the project of disallowance.

A further discussion in the 1894 session had to do with the alleged protestantism of the public school. It arose from a motion by A. F. Martin that the school should be secular—that is, that there should be nothing in the curriculum of a religious character. Those who wished to destroy public schools and to get separate schools re-introduced, said Mr. Sifton in reply, tried to drive out the Bible and all religion from the school in order that they might raise the cry of "godless schools". The argument was an old and well thought-out one in the United States and elsewhere: but if Mr. Martin thought the government would give him a chance of crying out that the schools were godless he would be disappointed. Under the law, he pointed out, no parent was obliged to have his child remain for religious exercises. This discussion had to do with one of the stock arguments against the Manitoba Public School system, which was used all through the controversy with considerable effect. Denominational schools fully in charge of the churches were understandable; purely secular schools at the other extreme were also understandable; but schools in between with restricted religious instruction fixed by the state—what were they but Protestant schools? And was it not an outrage that Catholics should be taxed to support Protestant schools?

The defence put forward to this charge was that it was absurd to claim that there was anything sectarian in character in selections from the Bible, a choice being permitted

between the Authorized and Douay versions, to be read without comment. These Manitoba selections, it was pointed out, were almost identical with the exercises prescribed for the Ontario public schools, in which a majority of the Roman Catholic children of that province were being educated. To these exercises, Archbishop Lynch, on behalf of the Roman Catholics of that province, it was explained, had made no objections. The character of the school that the great majority of the people wanted had been outlined by the Rev. J. M. King, Principal of Manitoba College, at the beginning of the controversy in these words:

"If a purely secular system of education is deemed in the highest degree objectionable, and a denominational or sectarian system only less objectionable, what is it proposed to establish in their place? I answer, a system of public, unsectarian but not non-religious schools. It is admitted on all hands that the main work of the school ought to be instruction in the various secular branches. Its primary aim is to fit those in attendance for the active duties of life. But as not inconsistent with this aim, rather as in a higher degree subservient to its attainment, it is desired that the religious element should have a definite place assigned to it in the life of the school; that it should be recognized to this extent at least, that the school should be opened and closed with prayer; that the Bible, or selections from it, should be read daily, either in common, or in the Douay version as the trustees may direct; that the morality inculcated should be Christian morality, and that the teacher should be at liberty to enforce it, and should be encouraged to enforce it, by those considerations, at once solemn and tender, which are embraced in the common belief of Christendom. A system of public education of this kind, in which religion has a definite but at the same time strictly guarded place assigned to it, ought to be acceptable to the great majority of the people of this province."

This was the kind of school which had been established by the Legislation of 1890: and there was a refusal on the part of the people to admit that such a school could rightly be termed sectarian or Protestant. They regarded it as



national and unsectarian, and they were prepared to defend their rights to supply themselves with schools of this character by all legitimate powers at their disposal.

### III

The aloofness of the Manitoba Government to the legal proceedings having to do with determining the right of the Dominion Government to hear the appeal of the minority, disappeared when the judgment of the Supreme Court was taken in appeal to the judicial committee of the Privy Council. They retained Mr. H. H. Cozens-Hardy and Mr. R. B. Haldane, who on behalf of the province waged a battle royal with Mr. Edward Blake and Mr. John S. Ewart, counsel for the appellants, when the case came up in December, 1894. The intricacies and complexities of the question before the court are fully set out in the hundred or more pages which record the argument of the contestants.

The right of appeal from a minority with an educational grievance, and the power of the Federal government to grant redress, were clearly set out in Section ninety-three of the British North America Act. There was a corresponding Section, twenty-two, in the Manitoba Act, with variations in the wording about the significance of which the lawyers wrestled. The pre-union rights which were to be protected were increased in the case of Manitoba by the addition of the words "by practice". But the specific statement in the British North America Act that in the event of a province, subsequent to Confederation, granting educational rights to a minority and afterwards withdrawing them an appeal would lie, did not appear in the Manitoba Act; there was just a general affirmation of a right of appeal from any act affecting a minority educational right or privilege.

The provision empowering the Dominion Government, in the event of a successful appeal, to make remedial laws, was identical in both acts. The difficulty of determining the



effect of the variations was surmounted by counsel for the appellants by the claim that the sections of both acts applied. The provincial lawyers argued that the provisions in the British North America Act did not apply at all; the provisions in the section in the Manitoba Act, dealing with the appeal and remedial legislation, had in their view a very restricted application, being in fact merely sanctions for the rights set out in the first sub-section.

The Judicial Committee found that the situation was governed by the Manitoba Act; and gave a wide interpretation to the powers thus conferred upon the Dominion Government. It could hear the appeal, and it could make the declarations or remedial orders asked for in the memorials; "but the particular course to be pursued must be determined by the authorities to whom it has been committed by the Statute".

This was, in itself, a sufficient answer to the questions submitted to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council; and if this had been the extent of the finding the political controversy which raged in Canada in 1895 and 1896 would have been conducted more intelligently and in a less heated atmosphere than was the case. But Lord Herschell, the Lord Chancellor, wrote the judgment in an expansive and discursive mood; it abounded in inferences, speculations and suggestions—mere *obiter*, as D'Alton McCarthy characterized them in his discussion of this question before the Canadian Government. From one portion of the judgment it was possible by a somewhat strained interpretation of his language, to deduce a theory that the Committee held that the Manitoba Act was an attempt, unsuccessful owing to defective drafting, to establish and perpetuate a dual system of denominational schools. Beyond challenge the Lord Chancellor did advance the historical speculation—it could be nothing else though there is much to suggest that he was near the mark—that the provisions for appeal and remedial

action were incorporated in the Manitoba Act in anticipation of the school legislation of 1870, with a view to making this post-union legislation, put through at the first Session of the new Legislature, the enduring educational law of the province.<sup>1</sup> And after stating that the Dominion Government had power to hear the appeal he made the additional observation that "legitimate grounds of complaint" would be met if supplementary provisions were added to the school act removing the "grievance".

The form in which this judgment was cast, rather than the actual finding, was deeply disturbing to the Manitoba Government. Clifford Sifton saw instantly that the case against the province in the contest which could now be foreseen, would be built, not upon the action of the Dominion Government, which could be readily fought, but upon the embroidery with which Lord Herschell had decorated his judgment. The assault upon the province would be represented, not as the political act of a government and as such open to rejection by the electors, but as the merely formal carrying out of an instruction by the Queen herself, based upon the recommendations of the judicial committee of the Imperial Privy Council, to oppose which would be treasonable and disloyal.

<sup>1</sup>In 1896 declarations were made by E. H. G. G. Hay and John Sutherland, members of the first Manitoba legislature, with reference to the circumstances under which the first school legislation in the province was enacted. John Sutherland on April 4th, 1871, brought in a bill providing for public schools; this was withdrawn, but after redrafting was reintroduced by John Norquay on April 27th. This measure contained no suggestion of a dual system; it made provision for a system of common schools. According to Mr. Hay's declaration, H. J. Clarke, the leader of the government, helped to draft this bill. On April 29th, Mr. M. A. Girard brought in on the behalf of the government a school bill in blank. Mr. Hay was informed at Government House that by the bill it was intended to establish a system of denominational schools, and he was offered a position in the government if he would accept it. Mr. Hay claimed that there was only a single copy of the bill before the Legislature. It passed the House on May 1st, the opposition being outvoted; was adopted by the Legislative Council on May 2nd; and was assented to May 2nd. This was the act which was supposed to bind Manitoba forever and a day.



Immediate steps were taken to prepare defences against this particular line of attack. When the Dominion Government, disguised as "Her Majesty's Privy Council", sat in Ottawa at the end of February, 1895, to hear the appeal of the Manitoba minority, D'Alton McCarthy appeared for the province, under instructions to marshall his most powerful arguments behind the claim that the government was sitting as a political body and that its decision and any action arising from it would be ordinary political acts. His opening remarks were a refusal to see the Dominion Government, the members of which were grouped before him as on the bench, as a judicial body. "The province which I represent here does not recognize the Council sitting in this matter as being any more than the Council sitting in any other matter, namely, as advisers of His Excellency the Governor-General." Mr. McCarthy went on with his argument on this point, quoting from Mr. Blake in the case before the Privy Council, from Mr. Ewart in the same case and from the statements by their Lordships; as, for instance, Lord Watson's remark that while he was prepared to decide on the meaning of the law he "was not prepared to relieve the Governor-General (in council) of considering how far he ought to interfere." Finally, Sir Mackenzie Bowell, the Prime Minister, broke in on the argument to admit that the Government would be responsible politically as an executive for whatever it did. "Then", Mr. McCarthy answered joyfully "I need not take up further time. My object is to show that you cannot be acting judicially."

The Manitoba Government was also overjoyed at this admission. Mr. Sifton wrote in congratulation to Mr. McCarthy:

"From the first I anticipated difficulty in making it clear to the public that the legal aspect of this question had passed away, and that it was now purely a question of Government policy. I do not think the other side yet realize how important it is to us to make this clear. If they did I fancy the premier would not have given the case away as he did in



reply to you. However, I think that we have sufficient ground now to go upon and they have gone so far in admitting our contention that they cannot very well get back."

Meanwhile, in Manitoba, the government had been making its position clear. In the speech from the Throne, at the opening of the Legislature on February 15th, its intention not "in any way to recede from its determination to uphold the present public school system" was declared. On February 28th, James Fisher, taking note in a lengthy resolution of the Privy Council judgment, called upon the Legislature to forestall the exercise of remedial legislation by the Dominion Parliament by itself meeting "all legitimate grounds of complaint". An amendment was moved by Sifton affirming that "interference by the Federal authority will be contrary to the recognized principles of provincial autonomy", and declaring that the House "will by all constitutional means and to the utmost extent of its power resist any steps which may be taken to attack the Public School Act." His speech in support was combative and uncompromising:

"The Honourable member wanted to know what the government would do when asked to amend the Act. This they would do: they would carry the matter to the Dominion Parliament, and if the parliament decided against them to the people of Canada, and perhaps before they got through the principles of the School Act of 1890 would be established in provinces other than Manitoba. The Province of Manitoba had not thrown the apple of discord into Dominion politics; that had been done by gentlemen on the other side of the House."

In March, Sifton is found in correspondence with D'Alton McCarthy as to the course to be followed when the Remedial Order, which is known to be in incubation, is forthcoming. Sifton agrees with McCarthy that the right course for Manitoba to pursue is to refuse to execute the order, thus throwing the matter into the Dominion Parliament. "There is no reason, however", he says, "why we

should give our answer immediately after we receive a copy of our order. We are entitled to take a reasonable time to consider and will probably do so."

On March 21st, 1895, the Remedial Order was issued by the Dominion Government instructing the Manitoba Government and Legislature to enact legislation restoring to the Catholic minority certain rights and privileges of which they were deprived by the legislation of 1890: the right to their own schools; the right to share proportionately in the public grants: and the right to be exempted from taxation for other schools.

#### IV

The issuing of the Remedial Order was the tocsin notifying the people that a crisis had arisen, and calling upon them to take their clubs and choose their sides. There followed fifteen months of bitter political warfare, into which every conceivable kind of motive—good and bad, high and low, public-minded and self-seeking—entered. The Manitoba school issue to those primarily interested remained what it always had been—an honest attempt on one side to protect the national school system of Manitoba, and an equally sincere determination on the other to pull it down and restore sectarian schools. Behind these Manitoba contestants were ranged allies equally single-minded and determined—on the one hand the Roman Catholic hierarchy, deeply concerned to recover the lost ground in Manitoba; on the other strong Protestant forces, largely Conservative in political feeling, which felt that this was an issue larger than politics.

Apart from these considerations the Manitoba school question was simply a battleground, upon which the two political parties manoeuvred with victory and office as the prize. After nearly four years of putting off the evil day of making up its mind the Conservative government in Janu-



ary 1895 found it necessary to decide whether it would leave Manitoba alone or go ahead and interfere. Political necessity gave it in fact no choice. Refusal to interfere meant immediate ruin; by taking the other course a year of the Parliamentary term remained in which possibly the dangerous cape might be doubled. It was the pressure of time that forced the arbitrary, apparently precipitate tactics of the government—it knew that its one chance was to get the thing done and over with before the appeal to the people. It could then say to the electors who were displeased that it acted under the compulsion of an order of the Judicial committee, the form of the judgment giving an air of plausibility to this wholly fallacious claim; while from the electors, happy over the development, it would ask the reward due to it for its courageous protection of the minority. Hence the promptitude with which the appeal was heard and the rapidity with which the Remedial Order was issued. Following the prompt rejection of the Remedial Order by Manitoba, which was looked for, remedial legislation would be submitted to parliament and the whole difficulty brought to a head in a minimum of time.

But if speed would help the government, delay, it was equally clear, would embarrass it; and unfortunately for it the rate at which the game could proceed was beyond its control. Delay that would force the government to the people with the question still unsettled would serve the interests of the various oppositions—the Dominion Liberal party intent upon political victory; the Manitoba Government willing to help out the Dominion Liberals, but more vitally concerned with protecting the National school system; and the insurgent Conservatives, ultra-Protestant in feeling, whose first concern was to prevent a remedial law being placed upon the Statute book. The war of tactics, to end in the ultimate bafflement of the Dominion Government, began.

The contribution made by Manitoba to the defeat of the Dominion was of course the collective work of the Greenway government; but it was at the time a matter of common knowledge that it was Clifford Sifton who planned the campaign and supplied the leadership. The government's opening shot was, upon receipt of the Remedial Order, to have it solemnly read to the Legislature; to remit to the members of the Legislature the responsibility of making a reply; and then, in order that they might give full consideration to this important matter, to bring about the adjournment of the House until May 9th. (The House did not in fact again meet until June 15th, owing to a further adjournment.)

Until the province refused to obey the Remedial Order the Dominion Parliament was not clothed with jurisdiction to act; Manitoba was in no hurry to dower it with jurisdiction. With the House adjourned, Mr. Sifton proceeded to give effect to his promise to appeal to public opinion outside the province by departing for Ontario to take a hand in the by-election in Haldimand, where Dr. W. H. Montague was seeking re-election upon entering the Dominion Government. It was his first political appearance outside the bounds of his own province, apart from a brief speech delivered by him at the Dominion Liberal convention held in Ottawa in 1893. He addressed large meetings at Hagersville, Caledonia and Cayuga; and was given in each place a careful and attentive hearing. His speeches were given prominence in the Ontario newspapers; his foray drew editorial comment, commendatory and otherwise, from the political journals; he was given an opportunity, through newspaper interviews, to supplement his platform appeal.

Though Dr. Montague was easily re-elected the incident served Mr. Sifton's purpose quite well. It gave an impetus to the popular uprising in Ontario against the Dominion Government's policy of coercion, which was already be-



ginning to take definite form. There had already been a public meeting in Toronto, presided over by the Mayor, at which prominent citizens belonging to both political parties had sponsored resolutions of protest. One of these resolutions, fathered by Rev. Dr. Caven, declared that "no just ground or pretence has been alleged, and none in fact exists for interference by the Dominion Government with the province in its control and management of the education of its youth." Very suggestive also of fear on the part of the government at the possible development of public opinion was the gingerly handling of the question by Dr. Montague in his political addresses. According to him the government had hardly done more than draw the attention of Manitoba to the grievances of the minority, and politely request it to deal with it. The Haldimand contest was undoubtedly an encouragement to the Manitoba Government to proceed along the road which it had marked out for itself.

Upon the reassembling of the Legislature Mr. Greenway (June 17th) submitted the memorial to the Dominion Government in which the Legislature refused to implement the Remedial Order; and it was supported by Mr. Sifton in an exhaustive and elaborate speech, in which the position of the Legislature *vis-a-vis* the Dominion Government was emphatically set forth.<sup>1</sup> The Legislature, in its memorial, interpreted the Remedial Order as an instruction to re-establish separate Roman Catholic Schools; this it declined

<sup>1</sup>The memorial was based largely upon a lengthy legal opinion obtained from D'Alton McCarthy. Some of the questions submitted to Mr. McCarthy by Mr. Sifton indicate the plans that were forming in his mind. "Can the Dominion Parliament, in enforcing the Remedial Order, legislate more than once? After the Dominion Parliament exhausts its jurisdiction can the Legislature pass a new school law which will take effect from its passage, irrespective of Dominion legislation? Could the Dominion Government instruct the Lieutenant-Governor not to assent to such a law? Had the Legislature complete power to direct the application of moneys appropriated by it? Could the Dominion Government empower a separate school district to levy taxation?"

to do. "We cannot accept the responsibility of carrying into effect the terms of the Remedial Order." The practical difficulties in maintaining an efficient system of primary education were indicated. The establishment of a system of Roman Catholic Schools would be followed by a set of Anglican schools and possibly by Mennonite, Icelandic and other schools, to the great impairment of educational efficiency. It suggested that the Dominion Government had not been fully informed, in passing the Remedial Order, of its consequences; and proposed that "a full and deliberate investigation of the whole subject" be made before there should be legislation. "No hasty action should be taken, but the greatest care and deliberation should be exercised."

There was some discussion of the legal aspects of the situation. It was held to be doubtful whether the Dominion Government could, in any case, empower school districts to collect taxes; while as for providing that a proportion of the legislative grants should go to separate schools, that was clearly beyond the powers of the Dominion. Nothing much could be done for the minority, it was hinted, without the voluntary co-operation of the Legislature; and this could only be obtained if the need for it should be shown by further investigation, which was proposed—a polite but menacing document impressing upon the Dominion Government the need for caution, for further investigation, for delay—recommendations displeasing to the government and fatal to its plan of strategy.

## V

From first to last the speeches made by Clifford Sifton on the school question would fill a good many volumes. In none of these speeches did he make a greater effort to put the case clearly and convincingly than in seconding the adoption by the Legislature of the memorial rejecting the Remedial Order. The report in a condensed form fills



several columns in the newspaper; perhaps a still more highly condensed summary may serve, for the purpose of this volume, to illustrate his manner of dealing with this subject.

It might be assumed (said Mr. Sifton) that the members had made up their minds upon the matter of the abstract principle of separate schools; it had been very fully discussed on many occasions. The position was therefore this, that if they were not bound by parliamentary compact to change the system of national schools, they would not authorize change. The only point to consider was, were they so bound? The act of 1890 had been held to be within the power of the province; whereupon the Roman Catholics appealed to the Governor-General-in-Council for relief. The Judicial Committee of the Privy Council to whom the matter had been referred held that an appeal would lie, and that the Governor-General-in-Council had power to make an order if he saw fit, not that there is a mandate compelling him to do so. Counsel of the minority and others had taken the view that there was a mandate.

Mr. Sifton quoted a number of authorities in support of the contention that the decision was not to bind the executive but was solely for their information. The executive was not relieved of any responsibility by reason of the action of the tribunal. He then considered the argument that the government was bound morally, if not legally, to restore the schools which the Roman Catholic minority had enjoyed for twenty years. He denied that the bill of rights, submitted by the delegates from Red River preparatory to the entrance of the settlement into confederation, contained any reference to separate schools; a copy of the bill of rights sent by Sir John Young to the Colonial Secretary established the fact.<sup>1</sup> The Manitoba Act did not establish separate

<sup>1</sup>The controversy over the bill of rights never was definitely settled. The delegates from the provincial (Riel) government presented a bill of rights to the Dominion Government in March 1870. Did it or did it not contain a demand for a dual system of denominational schools? Reverend Father Ritchot, one of the three delegates, declared that it did make this demand; and at the hearing before the Dominion Government in February, 1895, a certified copy of

schools; because when they were abolished under this act the Privy Council had found the action legal. The "grievance" of which so much was heard had no moral signification; it was used to imply the existence of a state of things which admitted or gave a right of appeal, and that was all it did imply. It was used in a purely technical sense—it meant not a wrong nor an injustice, but a right of appeal.

Mr. Sifton defended his action in visiting the east and giving expression to his views while the reply to the Remedial Order was under consideration. He had spoken reasonably and temperately, but plainly. He had said that the old system had been a bad system; that owing to improper methods employed the Catholics drew an undue share of public money for their schools; and that the education supplied by the Roman Catholic schools was so defective that the population dependent upon them grew up illiterate. The system which they had destroyed was one of defectively educated teachers (as illustrated by an examination paper set for the first-class certificate which was quoted) and illiterate pupils. What the government was determined should exist was a school system adequate and efficient for all, under which people should get the education they paid for and for which taxes were levied upon them. Yet the Dominion Government had asked them to restore

the bill of rights, filed as an exhibit in the trial of Ambrose Lepine in 1874, was produced in support of this statement. This seems conclusive. Yet on the other hand, it was clearly established by the testimony of survivors and by documents in existence that the bill of rights drafted by the popularly elected Convention of Forty contained no reference to denominational schools; and in the address quoted Mr. Sifton made the statement, presumably upon authority, that in the papers transmitted to the Imperial Government by Sir John Young, the Governor-General, it was the original and not the alternative bill of rights that was included. The likeliest explanation is that the clause demanding separate schools was an interpolation, possibly made by the Riel Provincial Government, which may have regarded itself as competent to amend the memorial of the Convention of Forty.



the old system with all its defects. It had not taken the Provincial Government long to decide that they would not do that. He denied that the government in not making any counter proposition was taking a narrow view. The 1890 Act represented the views of the government. Why, when it did not approve any alteration, should it agree to any?

The Dominion Government had shown no desire to negotiate with the province. On the contrary, the Remedial Order was peremptory and was intended to be final. Had the Dominion Government desired to acquaint themselves with the facts of the case they would have made an adjournment for the purpose of holding an investigation. They had suggested in the memorial that there was not enough evidence before the Dominion Government to warrant their proceeding with the Order. The government had not been given time to fairly present its case; the hearing had been proceeded with after only fourteen days notice. It would require several months of patient work to investigate the question and collect the necessary information. Legislation on the basis of such talk of preparation was an absurdity. They acknowledged some power of interference on the part of the Dominion, but they were not prepared to have it exercised on defective information.

In their reply to the Dominion Government the government had ventured to make some suggestions. A warning had been conveyed that their right to enforce the school legislation which they proposed to pass would be resisted in the courts to the highest tribunal. There were two things essential to the carrying on of separate schools—the levying of taxes, and participation in the legislative grant. He doubted if the Dominion Government could give separate school districts the power to levy taxes, and he was certain that public funds given for education could be diverted only upon the authority of the Legislature itself. He was willing to admit that the school system in operation was far from

perfect; but the conditions were better than they had been and were improving. In dealing with school districts the government was as lenient as it could be without actually breaking the law. It was their earnest desire to get all persons of all nationalities to comply with the law. There were objections on the part of the Mennonites to the law, but here and there it was being adopted; eventually, with tact and methods of conciliation it would be embraced by the different nationalities resident in Manitoba. With one school system the different nationalities would in time be assimilated, but if they departed from the chosen course the result would be disunity and divergencies which would grow wider with the years. He was confident, however, that the existing system of schools which were being carried on in the best interests of the people would not be disturbed.

## VI

With the definite refusal of Manitoba to obey the instructions of the Remedial Order the way was clear for the submission to Parliament by the Dominion Government of a measure giving effect to its wishes. But the Dominion Government, faced with opportunity, hesitated. Difficulties had arisen in the drafting of the Remedial Bill; there was unrest, threatening rebellion in the ranks; the session was near an end; the government itself was a warring family. Two of the French members of the government who had been making brave speeches in Quebec, foreshadowing drastic action, precipitated a cabinet crisis by announcing their intention of resigning. For a few days the situation was critical; but a compromise was patched up which enabled the government to keep together and to let the wearied and distracted members return to their homes.

The policy was to speak soft words to the recalcitrant province and to give it one more chance; with the promise of certain punishment if it persisted in its obduracy. Accord-



ingly, on July 27th, 1895, giving expression to a policy already announced to parliament, the Dominion Government passed an order-in-council which was duly transmitted to the government of Manitoba for its consideration. In this it was declared that it was believed by the government that the claims of the minority in Manitoba could be met without any impairment of "the efficiency or proper conduct, management or regulation of public schools." The government of Manitoba was to be asked once more to make a settlement "reasonably satisfactory to the minority", and pending their reply to this request parliament would not be asked to deal with remedial legislation. Parliament was to be again called in session not later than the first Thursday of January 1896. If by that time Manitoba had not acted the Dominion Government would "introduce and press to a conclusion such legislation as will afford an adequate measure of relief, based upon the lines of the judgment of the Privy Council and the Remedial Order of March 21st, 1895."

The Manitoba Government received this document of mingled entreaty and threat without comment, and for months maintained an attitude of complete silence. Privately, Mr. Sifton expressed to Mr. McCarthy his gratification at the course events had taken: "My view is that the news which we have received here within the last day or two, that Caron and Ouimet have returned to the government, and the unequivocal pledge given by Bowell and Foster to bring in remedial legislation at a session to be held in January, indicate that the government has made a much more serious blunder than any of the numerous ones which they have made hitherto. I should think that the definite pledge thus made to Parliament would have a very strong effect in arousing sentiment in Ontario, and the government would have stood a much better chance of getting a bill through

before adjournment or prorogation than they will have at any time in the future."

With the failure of the Dominion Government to enact legislation at this session, Mr. Sifton believed that the Manitoba Government held the key to the position from which it could not be dislodged; but for the time being the government kept silent and looked on while the Manitoba school issue, its provincial banks broken down, began to flood the whole field of Dominion politics. With an election in sight, since Parliament would pass by the effluxion of time on April 25th, 1896, the Dominion campaign had to get under way; and the school question, like Banquo's ghost, arose to spoil the harmony of many a party feast.

The Conservatives, distracted by internal dissensions, sought to develop discordant elements latent in the Liberal party, by insisting that Laurier define the official Liberal policy on the question. But Laurier smiled and waited. The Liberal leader's campaign in the fall months of 1895 was marked by his particularly deft parries to the attacks of his enemies. One was his remark that until the government's policy was fully revealed the Liberal party was within the lines of Torres Vedras; the other was the re-telling, with the neatest and aptest of applications, of the fable of the countryman who, refusing to take off his coat to the boisterous wind yielded it gladly to the gracious solicitations of the friendly sun.

In December the Manitoba Government abandoned its attitude of reserve, and struck. It made a defiant, unyielding reply to the Dominion order-in-council of July and, dissolving the Legislature, remitted the question to the electors. The reply followed, in part, the memorial of June, but was more militant in tone. The Dominion Government's policy was interpreted as the re-establishment of separate schools in Manitoba by the Dominion Government if neces-



sary. "The issue is therefore very clearly defined." The proposition was "positively and definitely rejected". Again the failure of the Dominion to have a thorough investigation was stressed. Legislation without investigation "seems to be incapable of reasonable justification, and must create the conviction that the educational interests of the people of the province of Manitoba are being dealt with in a hostile and peremptory way." Upon this note the provincial elections were fought and won.

Apart from the representatives of the French-speaking constituencies only five opposition members survived the storm. In February, 1896, the new Legislature met and on the 27th, at the instance of Mr. Sifton, it adopted a motion approving the government's December reply to Ottawa, and demanding that "a full and deliberate investigation of the whole subject should precede the passage of the legislation which was at that moment before the Dominion Parliament." No case had been made out, it was declared, for interference which would justify the Dominion Parliament in over-riding the well-recognized principle of provincial autonomy. The tactical importance which the government placed upon its charge that the Dominion was acting upon insufficient information was illustrated anew by the prominence given it in the supporting speech by Mr. Sifton. The government were prepared, he said in this address, to do anything in reason always provided that this did not mean State-aided separate schools.

Meanwhile, at Ottawa the Dominion Government ship was labouring in heavy seas. At the outset of the session it had narrowly escaped shipwreck through a mutiny in the crew—the notorious "nest of traitors" incident. Sir Charles Tupper, the party's indomitable veteran, was summoned from London, where he had for some years filled the position of High Commissioner, in the hope that he could save the situation. Upon arrival he re-entered public life on an understanding

that for the remainder of the session he was to lead the House, to which he was at once elected; and at its close he was to succeed to the Premiership and lead the party in the elections. In reality, from the day he arrived he took full charge of the party; and by audacious and courageous tactics sought to restore its fighting spirit.

The only course to pursue, it seemed to him, was to call up all the reserve force in the party and push the Remedial Bill through Parliament. The Bill, already before the House, fell a good deal short of the brave words of the Order; for one thing it yielded the point, which Mr. Sifton had pressed so resolutely, that the Dominion Government could not provide for grants to separate schools out of the funds of the Legislature. But it did clearly undertake to re-establish separate schools, and it was a practical recognition of Dominion control under certain conditions of provincial education. Powerful forces, political and religious, lined up behind it to secure its enactment by Parliament. Thereupon there ensued a Homeric struggle in the House of Commons. If the forces behind the Bill were bi-partisan, with fourteen Liberal members enrolled as supporters, the opposition was equally diversified. Mr. Laurier himself moved the six months hoist to the second reading, but some of the most effective resistance came from insurgent Conservative members from Ontario. Though the opponents of the measure did not agree on their reasons for opposing it, they were all of one mind as to the desirability of preventing its enactment during that particular session; and their concerted opposition was so vigorous, so prolonged and so resourceful that the Bill moved through the Commons at a snail's pace.

It was well along in March before the Bill got its second reading; of the majority of eighteen for it, fourteen represented the votes of Liberals upon whom the Government did not feel it could absolutely rely. The government had



been saved, Mr. McCarthy wrote Mr. Sifton, by getting at the last minute support from Conservatives, who sacrificed themselves and their convictions for the sake of the party. The result of the division encouraged the opposition. "The feeling here," Mr. McCarthy wrote to Mr. Sifton, "is stronger than ever, and if we can manage to prevent the carriage of the Bill this session you have nothing to fear." Sir Charles Tupper, stout old fighter though he was, began to have his doubts as to whether, in the time remaining, he could put the Bill through. Out of this moment of doubt and uncertainty arose the suggestion that a last minute attempt be made to negotiate a settlement; and forthwith there departed for Winnipeg an embassy seeking terms. The party bearing the flag of truce was made up of Sir Donald A. Smith and two members of the government: Mr. Dickey, Minister of Justice, and Senator Desjardins.

## VII

When the Dominion Government, beginning to despair of its power to give effect to its programme, turned to the Manitoba Government in the hope that a way out of its difficulties might be found, it was not alone in looking to Winnipeg. The foes of the government were quite as aware as it was of the part which the government of the little province could play in the battle of tactics which was being carried on at Ottawa. Letters sped westward filled with advice, with suggestions—the interest to be served being that of those who looked to the defeat of the Dominion Government in the elections. D'Alton McCarthy wrote to Mr. Sifton begging the government to stand firm: "I do not desire at all to influence your action by a consideration of the position of affairs from a Dominion standpoint. You no doubt will be guided in the course you may think it wise to adopt by what is best for your province, but I may say to you that it will be a very bitter disappointment to

the friends of Manitoba who have fought for its rights if there is any substantial yielding on the part of the Manitoba Government . . . Any yielding in the direction that the Church is insisting on would have a most blighting influence upon all lovers of freedom and those who support provincial autonomy. If this question remains unsettled, to be fought at the election, it will be the end of the protracted struggle arising from the pretensions of the hierarchy of Quebec to dominate the Dominion."

In the Sifton papers there are two unsigned memoranda received at this time, two days apart, from Ottawa. They are from the same person, obviously some one high in the management of the Dominion Liberal party. The writer of these documents was evidently on intimate terms with Sir Donald Smith, because there is a reference to a confidential conversation with him. In these memoranda the writer suggests courses of action to the Manitoba Government in their negotiations with the representatives of the Dominion Government. In the first memoranda, written at the first suggestion of a conference, the Manitoba Government is advised to make suspension of all attempts to advance the Remedial Bill in parliament during the progress of the conference an essential condition. (This was subsequently stipulated by the Manitoba Government and was agreed to by the commissioners; but the engagement was ignored by the government.) It is also suggested that the Manitoba Government should propose a policy of negotiation and of enquiry which would be wide enough to include conditions in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and other provinces where, within the ambit of a National school system, concessions satisfactory to the minority had been made.

In the second memorandum, sent after the names of the commissioners were known, the advice is more specific. There are thumbnail sketches of the Dominion commissioners: "Dickey, straight but inexperienced; Desjardins,



narrow, affable, but smooth and slippery and not to be depended upon: will no doubt keep in constant touch with the Archbishop." There should be insistence upon suspension of the consideration of the Remedial Bill during the life of the conference. This being attained, "if the conference is likely to be a failure," says the strategist, "it should be kept going as long as possible." Further, with an eye to the Dominion election, there is this suggestion: "It might with very great advantage be made to appear that if this present Federal Government, by reason of its hostile attitude (not being *persona grata*) prevented satisfactory settlement, still it by no means follows; but on the contrary, there is good reason to believe that a friendly conciliatory government at Ottawa would be able to arrange settlement that should be satisfactory, that the difficulties are not insurmountable but that friendly relations between negotiating governments is necessary to successfully overcome them." And there was in the document this fine Macchiavellian touch: "If you discover that the Federal Government is not free to accept anything short of a legally established separate school system you can with safety go a long way in making liberal offers." The Ottawa campaigners on both sides were overlooking no chances.

The conference which took place between the Ottawa Commissioners and Clifford Sifton, Attorney-General, and J. D. Cameron, provincial secretary, representing the province, covered six days and ended in complete disagreement. The documents include two formal propositions by the Dominion representatives and two replies, long and argumentative, by the Manitoba Ministers. The first proposition, under the analysis of the Manitoba representatives, was revealed as asking for the compulsory organization of separate schools; imposing serious financial obligations for their support on non-Catholic ratepayers; giving full control of religious exercises in these schools to the Church; provid-

ing for the erection of a separate normal school. It was therefore declared to be unacceptable.

In their reply the Dominion Commissioners suggested that the Manitoba delegates were not giving sufficient weight to the "undoubted legal position of the Catholics." "Under the judgment of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council and the Remedial Order they certainly have important legal rights in connection with separate schools." This admission that the establishment of separate schools was a minimum demand made accord impossible. In their final reply the Manitoba representatives said that it was clear that the demand was for schools separating by law Protestants from Catholics, and wholly dependent for support upon municipal taxation and the legislative grant; this they were absolutely debarred from conceding. An alternative proposition by Manitoba to secularize the schools, with provision for religious instruction at the close of the day which would enable Catholic children to receive instruction from their own priests, was not given consideration.

With the failure of these negotiations Sir Charles Tupper redoubled his efforts to get the Remedial Bill through the House of Commons; but he could not overcome the resistance of the bi-party opposition. Once the Bill got into the committee of the whole the deadlock was complete; and after more than a week of unavailing pressure the effort was abandoned. The aim of the official Liberal opposition, the insurgent Conservative group and the Manitoba Government to force the issue to the people was achieved. Parliament ran out its term; Sir Charles Tupper assumed the Premiership and reconstituted the government; and the issue of the Manitoba School question went to the electors.

## VIII

The net result of the election of June 23rd, 1896, was in keeping with the expectations; but in their forecasts of the



particulars of victory the prophets were far astray. The government showed strength where its destruction was looked for; the voters for whom it risked its life refused to vote for it. Out of most general elections there come results, partial or general, beyond explanation, except on the theory of instinctive mass movements beyond the ken or control of politicians; but the election of 1896 must remain the classic example of a logical and inevitable end being reached by illogical and almost inexplicable popular processes. Theoretically there never was a clearer issue. There was on the one side an intention to invoke an obscure constitutional power to impose separate schools upon a province which would not have them; on the other a denial of the wisdom of this policy, which did not exclude the holding out of hope that by consent or negotiation some amelioration of school conditions might be obtained for the Manitoba minority. The theory of our political system called for the complete acceptance of the issue by both parties and a frank submission of it to the electors; but our political practice called for the confusing of the issues and the hoodwinking of the electors. No political party has enough moral courage to face the consequences of frankly avowing its policies in localities or before audiences where they are unpopular. There is always an effort to blur the issue; by some trick of legerdemain to replace the ill-appearing object with something more agreeable to the eye.

There was a complete exemplification of these tactics, by both sides, in the election of 1896. In no constituency in the English-speaking provinces, where there was obvious popular hostility to the idea of coercing Manitoba, was there any admission that it was the policy of the government to resort to coercion. The government was only the agent, the reluctant agent, of the judicial committee of the Privy Council, which had said that the minority in Manitoba had educational rights and privileges of which they had been deprived, and which should be restored to them. Had not

the Queen issued an order to the government instructing it to do this? The government—with noble devotion to duty but with anguish in its heart—was obeying the orders of the highest court in the realm and enforcing the obligations of the constitution.

An incident in the campaign, in which Mr. Sifton appeared, affords an illustration of the nature and application of this argument. The contest in the city of Winnipeg was between Honourable Joseph Martin (who had been elected for this constituency at a by-election in 1893 upon the retirement of Hugh John Macdonald) and Honourable Hugh J. Macdonald, who had re-entered politics as Minister of the Interior in the government of Sir Charles Tupper. In the closing week of the campaign Mr. Sifton, addressing a meeting on Mr. Martin's behalf, challenged this theory, which had been the staple of the Conservative campaign in the province. After showing clearly that the political responsibility of both parliament and executive remained after the judgment of the Privy Council, Mr. Sifton said that there was no such thing as an English court, or even the English Government or Parliament undertaking to direct the House of Commons of Canada in a purely Canadian matter.

This remark was vigorously denounced by the *Manitoba Free Press* which, after a period of comparative political innocuousness owing to a change in ownership, resumed for the purposes of this campaign its former inveterate attitude towards the Liberals. Mr. Sifton's statement was placarded as "A Disloyal Utterance". After characterizing some remarks by Mr. Greenway as "a defiance of the Privy Council, probably only in bravado and in the hope of catching an ignorant vote that a less violent appeal would fail to move," the *Free Press* proceeded to say:

"And his Attorney-General follows his statement up by declaring that the Canadian parliament is not to submit to the dictation of the Imperial Privy Council. What is this but



treason? And all the worse treason coming from a Minister of the Crown and the Chief law officer of Her Majesty in the province of Manitoba. Canadian parliaments and governments and all other parliaments and governments in the Empire have to submit to the Dictates of the Imperial Privy Council, and when they refuse to do so they are in rebellion against the crown and dignity of the Queen. Canadians must bow to its authority or cease to be British. Mr. Sifton's words mean that, by defying the authority of the Privy Council, he would raise the standard of rebellion in Canada. We seem to be in the hands of men whose loyalty, to put it very mildly, is not above suspicion." Etc., etc.

It was with buncombe of this sort that the Conservative sophists sought, not without success, to confuse the electors; but their efforts in this respect had their counterpart in the ingenious interpretation of Liberal policy that did duty upon occasion in the Province of Quebec and elsewhere. The Conservative government had so mishandled affairs that it could do nothing for the minority! Why not give Laurier and his sunny ways a chance? If they failed, the powers of the Dominion remained, capable of being rigorously applied. When the time for voting came the government held its own fairly well in Ontario and the West where it had been most savagely assailed; while in Quebec the French electors, who were to be delivered solidly to the government by the clergy as a reward for the Remedial Order and the Remedial Bill, thronged to the polls to vote for Laurier. Probably the very emphasis which had been placed in the discussion on matters of race and religion operated to defeat the purpose of the disputants. On the one hand it reinforced the instinctive repugnance of the ultra-Protestants of Ontario and Manitoba to voting for Laurier, Frenchman and Roman Catholic; and on the other it whipped up racial pride in Laurier to the degree that nothing else mattered beside his elevation to power. But whatever the explanation of the way the electors voted the result was plain enough: the

government was overthrown and Laurier, with a clear majority of twenty-five, stood on the threshold of office.

Manitoba, strangely enough in view of the emphasis of its verdict in January, spoke with a divided voice. There was, in the Dominion campaign, neither the leadership nor organization which had contributed so greatly to the January triumph. Mr. Sifton gave his time and energies almost wholly to the constituency of Brandon, in which D'Alton McCarthy had been induced to stand in opposition to the government. Mr. McCarthy could give only a few days to the constituency owing to eastern engagements; but in this period he covered a large part of the constituency, owing to the organization which had been perfected by Mr. Sifton. On his way east Mr. McCarthy gave an interview to the *Manitoba Free Press*. "He spoke," says the paper, "in the highest terms of Attorney-General Sifton's assistance, without which he would not have been able to carry on the extended tour he did. Mr. Sifton would go ahead and open up a meeting in an adjoining town, while Mr. McCarthy was closing up in another place. Sometimes three meetings a day were held."

In the elections of June 23rd, Brandon stood like a rock against the government. In two other constituencies Liberals were elected; but Winnipeg was lost in a close vote, and the total tally for the province showed four seats for the government and three for the opposition. One of the ministerial seats, Macdonald, was carried by "human devices" so open and flagrant that the election was immediately voided, a Liberal being returned at the by-election; and a little later the Liberals got Winnipeg as well, upon the retirement from public life, temporary as it proved, of Mr. Hugh John Macdonald.

When Laurier set about forming his government he decided to invite Clifford Sifton to join it as the representative of the west. There were reports current that several



names were being considered; but it can be said that for these reports there was no foundation. Before the election took place Laurier had marked down Sifton as a colleague in the event of victory; and he lost no time, after taking office, in opening negotiations with him. But the school question barred the way to the immediate transfer of Mr. Sifton's activities to Ottawa. He stipulated that before he could accept the offer of a Dominion Portfolio a settlement of the school question acceptable to both governments must be negotiated; and further, it must be formally approved by a convention of Liberals of Brandon constituency, for which seat—placed at his disposal by Mr. McCarthy who had also been elected in his old constituency in Ontario—he proposed to stand. In the course of a few months time all these conditions were fulfilled, and on November 18th, Clifford Sifton became Minister of the Interior and Superintendent of Indian affairs in the Laurier Ministry.

## IX

The settlement of the school question was a vindication of the position which the province had so stubbornly maintained. The point upon which the province would not yield was its refusal to countenance the segregation of Roman Catholic children in their own schools, under conditions which would permit doctrinal religious teaching as part of the curriculum. In the proposals made by the Dominion Commissioners in March 1896 there was willingness to forego the right to organize separate school districts, provided the statutory separation of pupils was provided for in the public schools; this had been rejected by the Province on the ground that it "would divide the population for educational purposes into two classes, Roman Catholics and Protestants, giving to the Roman Catholics distinct and special privileges as against the remaining portion of the

people." It was this point which in turn the Roman Catholic hierarchy would not concede; hence the deadlock.

While the school settlement was being negotiated Mr. Israel Tarte, Minister of Public Works, visited Winnipeg to learn what the attitude of Archbishop Langevin was, in view of the political developments of the year. "Archbishop Langevin stands firm", he wrote to Mr. Laurier, "for the right to organize Catholic school districts. In other words, he demands the re-establishment of separate schools which, as you know, is out of the question. The priests who surround him are fanatical and full of prejudice."

Separate schools being admittedly out of the question, Laurier, on behalf of his compatriots and co-religionists, sought concessions within the circumference of the public school system. The Manitoba Government agreed to modify the existing school law in certain important respects. Religious teaching would be permitted during the last half hour of the school day by any Christian clergyman "whose charge includes any portion of the school district", or by his appointed deputy. This teaching could be authorized by the school board; or, alternatively, it must be provided if requested by the parents or guardians of a specified number of pupils—ten in a rural, twenty-five in an urban school. In single-roomed schools the time for religious teaching could be, if necessary, equally divided between Catholic and Protestant clergymen; and there was a conscience clause enabling children to absent themselves at the wish of their parents. Where in a town school the attendance of Roman Catholic children averaged forty or upwards one Roman Catholic teacher was to be employed, upon petition of the parents of these children; in village schools the qualifying number of students was reduced to twenty-five. The same rule applied on behalf of the Protestants in districts where they were in a minority. It was specifically set forth in the agreement that "no separation of children by religious de-



nominations shall take place during the secular school work."

In addition to the written agreement there was an understanding that the Catholics should be given representation, justified by their numbers, upon educational bodies such as the advisory council and examining boards.

The agreement also contained a clause which in due time brought in the harvest of a second school question. This clause was in these terms: "When ten of the pupils in any school speak French or any language other than English as their native language, the teaching of such pupils shall be conducted in French, or such other language, and English upon a bilingual system." The intention here was to preserve the right of the French to their own language in the schools in which they were in a majority; the possibilities under this clause of saddling the province with a multi-lingual system of primary schools were not realized. It was expected, by the negotiators, that these privileges would be claimed only by the French; but the clause was made inclusive to forestall criticism—against Laurier for claiming and against Sifton for conceding special privileges to the French. Particular enquiries at first hand made in later years by the writer left the impression that the responsibility for this mistake—as it was proved to be by time—was equally shared by the two chief negotiators; each was rather inclined to suggest that the provision came from the other side, which was pretty fair evidence that it was a fifty-fifty responsibility.

The story of the political aftermath of the school settlement belongs rather to the Laurier than the Sifton record. The announcement of the adjustment was received in the ecclesiastical camp with shrieks of rage. Archbishop Langevin spurned it in a sermon delivered forthwith in St. Boniface Cathedral. The concessions were, he declared, "miserable crumbs thrown derisively at us." They were not

concessions but odious restrictions. The opinion of the church was tersely expressed by *La Minerve* of Montreal: "Laurier has made a disgraceful capitulation to the Manitoba bigots." Defeated in their hopes of attaining their purposes by the secular method of applying political influence, the bishops loosed the thunder of the Church, precipitating a conflict which ultimately required the attention of Rome.

As a political issue the school question rapidly disappeared from the Dominion field. The Conservatives would have nothing more to do with it; Sir Charles Tupper, in expressive vigorous language, said that he would not touch it with a forty-foot pole. Political consequences of moment followed the settlement of the question in Manitoba. It was denounced by the Orange Grand Lodge as a betrayal of national schools, and the Orange Conservatives who had given steady support to the Greenway government in two successive general elections seized the occasion to return to their party tents—a change which seriously weakened the foundations of popular support upon which the government rested.

Thus the school question, bursting out unexpectedly in the remote places of Manitoba in 1889 ran its turbulent course, changing the landmarks of Canadian politics. The political and constitutional consequences of this episode are written large in the history of Canada. It reduced to a nullity the provisions of the British North America Act, which sought to give the Federal parliament the power, in certain circumstances, to make educational laws and impose them on a province. The political impracticability of exercising this power was thoroughly demonstrated, but beyond this the unworkability of the scheme of divided educational authority was revealed. That, if the Remedial Bill had been enacted, the province could have made its operation impossible was pretty generally admitted, which accounts



in part for the readiness with which all the Dominion political parties agree to forget the Manitoba school question. If the Federal authority should hereafter intervene in the educational affairs of the province, it may be predicted that it will be by a resort to its powers of disallowance—a weapon which, while politically dangerous to the power using it, is legally effective.

It was of course the school question which not only introduced Clifford Sifton to the field of Dominion politics but gave him the training in political advocacy and management, which enabled him, at the age of thirty-five, to take his place in the arena, not as a neophyte, but equipped to become almost immediately one of the directing and governing minds of Laurier's first government, "the ministry of all the Talents" as it was called by its admirers.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### EARLY EXPERIENCES AS MINISTER

"Whoever has held the post of minister for any considerable time can never absolutely, unalterably maintain and carry out his original opinions. He finds himself in the presence of situations that are not always the same—of life and growth—in connection with which he must take one course one day, and then, perhaps, another on the next day."—*Bismarck*.

IN Sir Clifford Sifton's stormy political life there was one brief spell of almost complete calm and sunshine. This was the period between the victory of June 1896 and his joining the Dominion Government in November. A party entering upon office always has a gleam of honeymoon weather. The party itself is harmonious, happy and hopeful; the general public cheers the winner; and the defeated forces, depressed and exhausted, keep silent for the moment. The calm, so to speak, lasts only a minute; then there is trouble for the government, within, without. For Sifton this period stretched out for five months, owing to the delaying circumstances which prevented him from entering the government. There was a rival for this position, and as the sequel showed, he was not without backing; but the movement for Joseph Martin was lost in the tide of popular approval of the proposal that Clifford Sifton should go to Ottawa as the representative of the west. With the dying down of party feeling there was universal recognition that the west needed in the Ottawa Government the ablest man who could be got. Mr. Sifton, by almost universal consent, was this man. His youth, his energy, his evident faith in the future of the west, his courage, his capacity—all pointed



him out as the man for the position; and the understanding between him and Laurier, that soon became an open secret, was approved by everybody except Mr. Martin and his immediate following.

Mr. Martin's discontent with a development which eliminated him can readily be understood. Unless current opinion was wholly misinformed his resignation from the Greenway government in May 1891 had been intended to force a crisis, from which he would emerge as Premier of the province; but if this was the plan it was spoiled when Mr. Greenway offered the vacant position to Mr. Sifton. From 1893 to 1896 he had been a member of the House of Commons, playing a not undistinguished part in the lively parliamentary skirmishes of that period. He had fought a hard and almost winning fight in Winnipeg in the June elections, against a most formidable opponent—Hugh John Macdonald, a great vote-getter in his own right, with the added strength of an illustrious name and a cabinet position. The Manitoba school question which had supplied the dynamite by which the Tory citadel had been blown up owed its origin to him. It was natural and inevitable that he should regard himself as the man from the west whom Laurier should delight to honour.

But Laurier picked his own cabinet, to the great surprise of many who could not believe, at that time, that behind his deferential and courteous manner there was a mind capable of clear judgment and a will of steel. Laurier, watching Martin through three sessions of parliament, decided that he did not want him for a colleague. He had endured Sir John Thompson's merry gibe about having in his following "a black Tarte and a yellow Martin"; but he did not care to have it repeated in connection with his government. He turned, as Greenway had five years earlier, to Sifton. Once again Mr. Martin found the road to his future blocked by the greater acceptability of his younger rival. A milder-

mannered man than Mr. Martin would have found the repetition of the experience annoying. To one as combative and quick-tempered as he, it was intolerable. He rallied his friends and in September had it out with Laurier, to no purpose. Correspondence between Laurier and Sifton at this time reveals an intention on Laurier's part to give Martin the offer of a judgeship. If the offer was made it was declined. Mr. Martin was not yet through with politics. Henceforth, he did not disguise his hostility to the man whom he regarded as his supplanter; and as the recipient of this hostility did not go on the principle of turning the other cheek, they were soon at open feud with one another.

Mr. Sifton, in a series of speeches—one made immediately before he entered the government at a dinner given Mr. Tarte in Winnipeg, the others at complimentary banquets following his appointment—made declarations of intentions and policies which confirmed the west in its opinion that it had got the right man. The failure of the west to develop had been a bitter disappointment, not only to the people of the west but to the whole country. Five years earlier, Edward Blake, in the lamentations of the West Durham letter<sup>1</sup> had spoken of "an empty west, empty still"; in the intervening years it had remained stationary, if it had not actually retrograded. Apart from its railway construction programme, which was courageous and far-sighted, the government's policies, intended to further development in the west, as shown in such matters as land regulations, efforts to induce immigration, the supervision and encouragement of settlers, had been, upon the whole, ill-considered and badly applied. There was, in consequence, a drift outwards that largely off-set the dribblets of immigration that came into the country. "The trails from Manitoba to the States", said one western newspaper (*The*

<sup>1</sup>Letter by Edward Blake to the electors of West Durham, March 1891.



*Times of Winnipeg*) in a moment of exasperation, "were worn bare and barren by the footprints of departing settlers."

In the early 'nineties all Canada was prostrate under depression; in the west there was stagnation, breeding despair. In those days indeed many in all parts of Canada despaired of the commonwealth; there were, to an observant eye, signs that the belief was growing that the experiment of Confederation had definitely failed; and there was a good deal of furtive discussion as to the possible advantage of annexation to the United States. The colonization and immigration movement in the west was barely noticeable. In 1896 only 902 immigrants applied for homesteads; an equal number of applications by Canadians brought up the total to the beggarly figure of 1,857, a number reduced in fact to 1,400 by the cancellation of entries of earlier years. The total sales by all the land companies of the west ran to about only a quarter of a million dollars a year.

This collapse of western hopes was naturally a subject of discussion in the Dominion election of 1896. Mr. Sifton, in his Winnipeg speech, June 20th, had made some pointed references to it. "Since 1882 the progress of Manitoba has been most disappointing; it had not developed as it should have done if a proper policy had been developed at Ottawa. The land policy of the government alone was enough to kill any new country. To-day the great need is to have as Minister of the Interior one who will grapple with this question in an intelligent vigorous way. It was useless to spend thousands of dollars in bringing immigrants here when there was no proper means of locating them. What was needed was a study of the agricultural needs of the country, the problem of education and the settling of the vast quantity of vacant lands." The handicaps of high tariff and high freight rates were also dwelt upon as contributing causes to western stagnation.

In his public address, upon taking office, Mr. Sifton said that in accepting office he had stipulated for a free hand in policies designed to settle the west. He pledged himself, in his Brandon address, to administer the Department of the Interior with a single eye to the development of the country. In particular, appointments to the Immigration branch would be made with care. With proper methods the country's population could be greatly increased, and this meant the appointment of the best available expert. Speaking a few days later in Winnipeg he said he had come to the conclusion that the whole question of immigration would have to be studied from top to bottom, and radical changes made. In the previous ten years as many farmers, in his opinion, had gone out of Manitoba as had come in. They had gone away, and no adequate study had been made of the cause. The country had lost settlers of the most desirable class, and did not know what was necessary to hold those that remained. The first thing to be done was to find out what was necessary to make the farmers they already had prosperous and contented. After that had been done the next step was to find out what was necessary to bring people here.

Such were the policies which Mr. Sifton had in his mind to plan and carry out, as he took the train for Ottawa amidst the plaudits and with the good wishes of the people of the west.

## II

Tasks of great complexity and much public importance were awaiting the attention of the young minister. Conditions called loudly for the re-organization of the department entrusted to his charge. Of the Department of Interior at that time Mr. Sifton himself once gave this description: "The crying complaint was that it was a department of delay, a department of circumlocution, a department in which people could not get business done, a department



which tired men to death who undertook to get any business transacted with it.”<sup>1</sup> Regulations had to be overhauled and new methods of doing business devised. Forty million acres of land were tied up in railway reserves awaiting the time when railway companies would condescend to make their land grant selections; something had to be done about this. An organization had to be built up capable of securing immigrants in Great Britain, the United States and the continent of Europe.

Mr. Sifton had hardly taken office when the immense problem of the Yukon challenged his attention. As the sole representative in the government of the entire west he had to interest himself in many matters lying outside his own extensive department.

The task was immense, the opportunity great; and the young minister, with high hopes, entered zealously upon the duties of his office. One of his first acts was to write to one of the newly-elected members from a territorial constituency, who had had experience in the assembly, asking his sympathetic co-operation. “You can rely”, he wrote, “upon me doing the best I can to assist in the development of the country and make the administration in the interest of the public.” There would be a lot of knotty problems to solve, including the pressing necessity for the re-organization of the departments. “I will”, he said to his correspondent, “rely a very great deal upon your discretion and judgment in dealing with matters relating to the western portion of the Territories especially.” His first actual departmental tasks were to close out two matters which had long been hanging fire between Manitoba and the Department. He advised the province that the old trails would, upon completion of certain preliminaries, be transferred to it; and he agreed to issue titles for half-breed claims in keeping with

<sup>1</sup>In the House of Commons, May 31st, 1906.

the recommendations of the registrar of the Manitoba land titles office.

About this time the job-hunters descended upon him, singly, in droves and in battalions; and thereafter he discharged his administrative and legislative duties in the odd moments when he could escape their attention. In those days it was an understood thing that "to the victors belong the spoils"; in the practical application of the rule the humorous variation of the motto, "to the victors belong the broils" was justified. For eighteen years no Liberal had been appointed to the civil service; Liberal members of the civil service who had survived the proscription of 1878 had, with rare exceptions, been denied promotion. With a Liberal government safely in office the demand arose for the righting of ancient grievances, for revenge, for punishment, for reward. If the departments had been cleaned out from Deputy Minister to office boy the positions thus made available would not have been sufficient to meet the demand for jobs; and behind this mob of office-seekers there was the opinion of the party rank and file that the Tory office-seekers should be given over to execution.

Unlimited vindictiveness towards unbelievers is as easy in the political as in the religious world. Against this demand for universal proscription the Liberal ministers had to stand out. Their natural feelings of humanity, the necessity for retaining competent and experienced officials, and a decent regard for the opinions of people who were not party-mad, combined to limit the dismissals to cases in which some measure of justification could be pleaded, on grounds of partisanship or need of economy. These cases were numerous enough to open a large number of positions, since many public officials, appointed for party reasons and aware of the uncertainty of their tenure in the event of a change of government, took part unblushingly in political contests; but they were not numerous enough to go around. Ministers, in filling these positions, found themselves in agreement with



the member of Mr. Mackenzie's administration who said that, whenever he filled an office, he made one ingrate and ten enemies. "In honour preferring one another" was an instruction in conduct without meaning for those who felt that the party owed them a living and that, not to recognize the obligation, was an indefensible exhibition of ingratitude.

All the ministers were in hot water over this question.<sup>1</sup> and Sifton most of all. The myth that he was a ruthless, cold-blooded pursuer of political advantage was already widely believed; and he was looked to to exemplify these qualities by putting Conservative office-holders to the sword. Moreover new offices, in keeping with promised developmental policies, were foreseen; and there was a race to file preëmptions for these. Much was expected of him, and though he gave much—to an extent which made him the target for savage attacks by his political foes—he never even made a beginning in satisfying the demands. A study of his correspondence for his first two years of office supplies a complete case against political patronage. It has no virtues. Political appointment is no guarantee of capacity in the person appointed, as the records of those days clearly show. It is of no political advantage to the party exercising it; on the contrary it makes more enemies than friends for a party. And to the administrator, charged with public business, it is a ruinous distraction.

Some notes based upon this correspondence are enlightening upon all these points. Through January and

<sup>1</sup>"The distribution of patronage was the most important single function of government. Sir Wilfrid frequently repeated the story of Lincoln, asked during a crisis in the civil war whether it was a change in the army command or complications with foreign powers that wrinkled his forehead and replying, 'No, it is that confounded postmastership at Brownsville, Ohio.' No other subject bulked so large in correspondence; no other purpose brought so many visitors to Ottawa. It meant endless bombardments of ministers, ceaseless efforts to secure a word from the friend of a friend of the premier, bitter disappointment for the ninety-and-nine who were turned empty away." Skelton's *Life of Laurier*, Vol. II. pp. 270-1.

February, 1897, there is a steady acknowledgment of letters asking for positions, with general promise of consideration. In one of the letters there is a note of apprehension. Mr. Sifton refers to "the appalling amount of work that I have to grapple with", and adds: "I hope my friends will help me, rather than embarrass me, to put my department upon a more efficient basis." There is a quarrel among the Quebec members as to who is to control patronage in connection with the immigration offices in Quebec City. It rages for months; Sifton writes to Fitzpatrick that he is completely at a loss what to do. All through March Sifton is kept busy writing to angry Liberals in Winnipeg, defending his action in giving a small money grant to the Western Immigration Association, an organization interested in bringing in and looking after immigrants. The Secretary of the association, it appears, is a Conservative; in giving public money to such a body Sifton, it is explained to him, has committed the unforgivable sin. His defence is that the association is doing a useful work and should not be ignored; "we have to be careful not to antagonize elements which have means to make themselves felt in a public way." Several of the letter writers turn aside from their denunciations to ask for jobs for themselves or their relatives.

By this time the Winnipeg seat is vacant. Sifton urges Isaac Campbell, Q.C., to stand for it. Campbell declines on various grounds, one being that he would not submit to being bothered by the patronage nuisance. Sifton in reply admits that it is a nuisance, but asks him "to allow something for the infirmity of human nature." Trouble breaks out further west. Calgary Liberals demand the head of the Superintendent of Banff Park; the local Liberals defend the superintendent; Sifton refuses to act despite the outcry in Calgary.

By this time the applicants who have not received jobs are quite sure that there is a favoured clique to whom the



jobs are going; Sifton makes an angry reply to charges of nepotism: "I have never appointed, recommended the appointment or asked for the appointment of any person connected with myself in the most remote way under the present government or under the Provincial Government." He has to tell a very influential friend in Winnipeg that he cannot get, for a lieutenant in the infantry school at Winnipeg, a transfer to the Mounted Police with high promotion. He explains to a member of the Manitoba Legislature that it is quite impossible to secure for him a job in Ontario, which has been opened by the dismissal of the former occupant. He defends himself from a complaint that he does not appoint friends of the government to office. To a demand by an influential territorial Liberal that he bring about the dismissal of the Superintendent of Public Works, a Conservative appointee, he makes an emphatic refusal on the ground that there are no just grounds for complaint; "I have not seen or been informed of any reasonable grounds for finding fault with him."

Advised by his father that he hears that a general rebellion is impending, he says that most of the serious kicking is "because I am trying to do my duty instead of appointing everyone to office."<sup>1</sup> He writes at some length about his troubles to Isaac Campbell: "I have done everything I possibly could to meet everybody's wishes, but I only have five loaves and two fishes; and what are they among so many! I do not fancy there is any reasonable ground for finding fault. There are one or two cases where I have retained and promoted Conservative officials because of their conspicuous ability, but I fancy that most

<sup>1</sup>"I am told there is a state of rebellion in the West, at least several people have told me so. I have tried to find out what the trouble is, but when it comes down to particulars it generally vanishes into nothing. I am afraid it is an old disease of the Liberal party. We were always noted for kicking ourselves out of power immediately after we got in."—Letter to Hon. Robt. Watson, Aug. 23, 1897.

of the kicking arises from two causes. First, by the officials we have dismissed going around creating dissension, and they naturally find some sympathizers even amongst our own side. Next, some of our own men who want positions do not see any reason why, when vacancies have been made to promote efficiency, they should not be filled by Liberals. Of course these two causes I cannot obviate." In a later letter to the same correspondent he says: "I am going through the same process that I did when I went into the Manitoba Government. You will remember that the papers kept lying about me until the people who did not know me thought that I was a cross between a wild Indian and a New York burglar."<sup>1</sup> And to another correspondent: "I am worked out. I wish some of the d—— fools who are grumbling had my job for a week. They would quit it wiser and sadder men." There is a humorous letter to William Lount, M.P. for Centre Toronto, who in September wrote him that he had a man who was an applicant for a position in the Klondike. To this letter Sifton replies: "Let me express the hope that in other matters of business, professional or otherwise, you do not get so far behind as you are in this

<sup>1</sup>During these times of trouble Mr. Campbell was like a rock in a weary land to the harassed minister. Respected by all parties for his probity and ability and beloved because of his kindly disposition and compelling charm, his whole-hearted support was of incalculable value to Mr. Sifton at this juncture. He was prepared to do anything for the minister, except to contest Winnipeg for the Dominion Parliament, or accept an office at his hands. There were two by-elections in the constituency of Winnipeg during this parliament; but Mr. Campbell resisted on both occasions the importunities of Sifton, though in one case there was a hint that membership in the House would lead to a seat in the government, Sifton declaring that he was seriously thinking of dropping out at the end of the term. Upon being offered the Chief Justiceship of Manitoba he declined the position, saying that upon the whole he thought he would like to stay with the boys awhile longer. In acknowledging this letter Mr. Sifton said: "I have just had a conversation with the chieftain and Mr. Mills (Minister of Justice). We have agreed that as a man who refused a Chief Justiceship in Manitoba is somewhat of a *rara avis* we would like you to send down your photograph framed so that we may hang it up." Later Mr. Campbell declined a senatorship. He died in Winnipeg in 1929 at the age of 76.



particular matter. All the inhabitants of Canada, except yourself, most of those in the United States and a great portion of the population of Europe are already on my list as applicants for positions in the Klondike, and much as I should like to meet your wishes I am obliged to say that your application is a little late. I hope and trust that the next unfortunate applicant for office who places his case in your hands will be able to get his application registered a little nearer the top."

In time Mr. Sifton accepted the situation more philosophically, expressing the opinion in various letters that, given time, the assault upon the government would die down. This indeed happened; for one reason or another a good many office-seekers gave up the pursuit as hopeless. A split in the party in Manitoba, due in large part to disappointment about offices, gave many of the disgruntled a refuge from which they could carry on guerilla warfare against the government, and especially against the Minister of the Interior. But the experience was not lost upon Mr. Sifton; and years afterwards, speaking as a private member in the House of Commons, he gave his frank opinion about the spoils system and patronage in these words:<sup>1</sup>

"For my part I would be delighted if the right honourable leader of the government could join with the honourable leader of the opposition, and perform for the public of Canada the very great service of removing the public service entirely from political patronage, and putting it on a higher plane. We are all members of parliament; we have all been through this business ourselves and we know all about it. I am not going to discuss it at length, but every member of parliament knows that the greatest nuisance in connection with public life concerns the dealing with questions of patronage. Every minister knows the same thing. It is an entire mistake if anybody supposes that dealing with these questions is a political advantage to the government in power. It is not a political advantage to the government in power, and it is no political advantage to any member of

<sup>1</sup>In the House of Commons, May 20th, 1908.

parliament. Take the case, for instance, of appointing a collector of customs or a postmaster; how many members of this House have ever got any advantage by the exercise of patronage in a case of this kind? Take the case of appointing a clerk to the customs office in Vancouver, or in Montreal, or in Halifax; how is he appointed? The minister asks the member to make a recommendation, and the member writes to some one in one of these cities; he gets back the name of a person, whom he does not know and as to whose qualifications he knows nothing; and the man is appointed without the minister knowing anything about him or his qualifications. There is no other way to do it under the present system. It was done by honourable gentlemen on the other side of the House when they were in power; it is done by us when we are in power. Possibly owing to the natural virtue of Canadian citizens, the results have not been as bad as they might have been; yet obviously, this is not the best system under which the public service of the country can be carried on. There is a better system, and, Mr. Speaker, I want to say this, that while I know the feelings of many members of parliament upon the subject, I am sure that Canada will outgrow this system pretty soon; that the people of Canada will demand that it be changed; and it is the duty of a progressive parliament to anticipate the enlightened sentiment of the country, and put these reforms into practical shape before they are forced to do so by the abuses which the people will no longer stand."

### III

When Clifford Sifton took his place in the Laurier ministry he had to decide upon his personal attitude towards the problems with which the government had to deal. Up to that time he had been too busy with other things to give much thought to these particular matters. The task of defending his province against Dominion aggression had monopolized his time and his energies, and his incursions into the Dominion field had been mostly for the purpose of aiding in this defence; when, apart from this issue, he touched upon Dominion matters, he used the conventional language employed by his party. He took his views, for



instance, about the tariff or about railway rates and their effect upon the country from the current accepted party opinion.

But when he went to Ottawa he turned his powerful searching mind directly upon these and other Dominion problems; it was a necessity of his nature that he should do his own thinking and reach his own conclusions. In none of these matters did he reach conclusions by calculation; there was no careful balancing of advantage and disadvantage, of what was practicable and safe with what was dangerous. It was on this point that so many of the judgments on the policies and actions of Sifton during the whole of his political career went wrong. He was constitutionally incapable of pretending, for the furthering of a political end. His political actions flowed directly from his beliefs; and these were an integral part of the man, not to be put off or on at the call of expediency. It never could be said of him, as was said of one of George the Third's ministers, that "principle with him was a kind of water ballast to be pumped in or out as required." It was this inability to dissemble, coupled with an uncalculating readiness to make good his views by any recognized form of combat that made him, not the most successful politician of his generation, but in many respects the greatest individual political force of his time.

With a swiftness that was, in large part, instinctive, Sifton took his position in the ever shifting field of political opinion. Thereafter he knew the stars by which he steered his course. These decisions, or rather this revelation to himself of his bent and his mental attitude towards fundamental principles of government, were in a sense final; they, of course within fairly wide limits, governed his actions through his whole political career. Having found himself, having come to fairly definite opinions as to policies which seemed to him necessary, he made no bones about letting the public know where he stood, though this course, as he

doubtless knew, was bound to give his enemies within the party—of whose existence he was acutely aware—weapons with which to attack him. He might very easily have kept his own views under cover, and allowed the impression to be created that for policies, inaugurated by the Laurier Government, which made no appeal to western opinion, he had only to bear the responsibility of giving a reluctant consent. This would have been the line of least resistance; and the average young politician, with his future still to make, would have taken it trusting to time to show a way out from the situations thus created. But it never occurred to Sifton not to be perfectly frank with his political associates. Hence we find him, within two or three months of his entrance into the Dominion Government, writing letters back home which must have given, in colloquial language, a "bit of a jolt" to the recipients. Three of these letters will be quoted in verification of what has here been said.

One was to a farmer of his constituency, James Fleming of Whitewater. Mr. Fleming held pronounced views on the tariff. He wanted to see the last vestige of the National Policy tariff removed from the statute book, and he wrote to Mr. Sifton suggesting that if the revision of the tariff, then pending, were not in the interests of the west, he should retire from the government. To him Mr. Sifton wrote on March 13th the following lucid and interesting answer:

"I do not need to assure you of the fact that I could readily make up my mind to take that step if I thought it necessary or proper. On the other hand, I imagine that my view as to what is a proper revision in the interests of Manitoba and the North West Territories and Eastern Canada as well, will in all probability be radically different from yours. I not only would not retire from the Government because they refused to eliminate the principle of protection from the tariff, but I would not remain in the Government if they did eliminate the principle of protection entirely from the tariff. I would consider that to so construct the tariff as to wantonly destroy the industries that



have been built up under it, would be utterly unjustifiable from any possible standpoint of reason. I may say that on principle I am a very strong freetrader. I have been fed and educated on free trade doctrines, but doctrines do not always apply to facts. The people decided some eighteen years ago to have the protective policy, and got it, and have stood by it ever since. And the business of the country, to an extent that very few people imagine who have not made a study of it, has adapted itself to the tariff; and the introduction of a tariff from which the principle of protection would be entirely eliminated would be fraught with results that would be most disastrous to the whole Canadian people, including the people of Manitoba and the North West.

"I may say that upon matters of this kind I do not take very much stock in abstract doctrines. I have from circumstances been led to study politics more than anything else for the last ten years, and I have a profound distrust of the wholesale application of theories to business. What I propose to do is to relieve the burdens, as far as can reasonably be expected, of the people of the Territories that I represent in regard to tariff contributions and freight rates, and to protect their interests in other ways as far as it can be done; but I do not intend to insist that the business of other Provinces shall be destroyed and thousands of good Canadian people turned out of employment for the sake of carrying out a theory. I believe that the manufacturers of Canada and the people of Canada were more prosperous in 1878 than they are now, and the old  $17\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. tariff was better both for manufacturers and people, but eighteen years of protective tariff have caused a complete change in the business of the country. Business has adapted itself to the tariff, and no possible human wisdom can cut the tariff down to what it was before without causing widespread destruction. I thought it was proper for me to be perfectly frank with you on the subject."

Three days later he acknowledged a letter from R. L. Richardson, M.P. for Lisgar. In the parliamentary contest of the preceding June, in which he had defeated Robert Rogers, Mr. Richardson had rather left the impression that his election would mean the extirpation of the duties on agricultural implements, especially on binders and mowers.

The original duties in the National Policy tariff on these implements were at the rate of 35 per cent., but these had been reduced to 20 per cent. by the Conservative government shortly before it went out of power. With the new government busy on the task of making its first tariff, Mr. Richardson made enquiries from Mr. Sifton as to what the prospects were for a cut in the duties on implements to 10 per cent. or for their total abolition. In reply, Mr. Sifton said even a reduction to ten per cent. was out of the question. "There is no doubt it would bankrupt every implement concern in Canada, and I doubt that there would be any justification for it." And he added an observation probably not very agreeable to Mr. Richardson, with his campaign promises still ringing in his ears: "I may say that on that point [abolition of the duty] I am not in the position of having to take back anything I have said. I never under any possible circumstances said anything about free implements, in public."

Simultaneously with this letter from Mr. Richardson he got a letter from J. H. Ashdown, the leading merchant of Winnipeg, who had been the Liberal candidate in Marquette in the Dominion elections. Mr. Ashdown thought the Dominion Government should apply pressure to force a reduction in freight rates; he wanted a horizontal cut in the rates of about 17 per cent. To him Mr. Sifton replied:

"I have given this whole matter as careful consideration as I am capable of giving, and I still think the concessions you ask for are too extreme, and that it would be unreasonable to demand it. In the first place, so far as reduction from 17 to 14 cents for the first year is concerned, the Company will be getting nothing for that; and as the Crowsnest Pass line would not be built until the second year, any traffic they might get out of that would not be got until after that time. There are a great many things to be considered in connection with matters of this kind, outside of the simple desire of our people to get their freight carried more cheaply, a desire with which, I may say, I am in full



accord, but I do not by any means admit that there is any obligation on the part of the Government to drive the railway company into bankruptcy during the first year or two of its exercise of its powers of office."

The point of view held by Mr. Sifton, which was responsible for these blunt and not very diplomatic statements of opinion, was that the government was responsible for the business and prosperity of the country, and could not afford to indulge too freely in experimentation for the purpose of putting political theories to the test. Things as they were should be accepted, subject to reasonable and gradual modifications. "Reasonable" was a word often used by him because it represented what was in his mind. During the Dominion campaign of 1896 he had said that the Liberals desired only an intelligent revision of the tariff so that the great body of the consumers would get a reasonable chance. Governments could and should be an active promoter of prosperity by creating or controlling conditions under which prosperity could be achieved; but it could do very little by direct participation. There is a rather striking exposition of his general views on this question in a letter from him at this time (March 1897) to a friend in Nelson, who had written him urging that the government build the projected Crowsnest Pass railway as a public work, thus relieving the people from exploitation not only by the private railway (Canadian Pacific Railway) but by the extra-legal activities of its officials:

"Of course, I perfectly understand that the Railway Company is not a philanthropic institution, that it makes all the money it can make, and I have no doubt its officials form rings and work things to their own advantage in out-of-the-way places like Kootenay: but if you think, my dear friend, that government officials would not do the same thing on a government railroad, you will be very much mistaken and you will find that, whereas you can get the railroad company's official dismissed by proving that he has

been guilty of improper conduct, you cannot always get that done with a government officer. Experience shows that in the past the most guilty and rascally officials have been kept in place by political influence."

His objections to direct action by the government for the improvement of conditions did not arise from any unquestioned acceptance of the doctrine of *laissez-faire*; they were rooted in a profound disbelief in the ability of government to function efficiently in these fields. Later on, as will be seen, he modified his views somewhat as to the limits of effective government participation in large national operations; but to the end he inclined to the view that the best results, both in human happiness and national welfare, would be obtained by the government permitting, under supervision that protected the community from exploitation, the free play of human energies, desires and ambitions. As this record of his life will abundantly show, he was never in favour of supplying facilities or creating conditions for the serving of private greed; he was always and everywhere opposed to the exploitation of the people. The public interest must always be protected; subject to this he had no objection to the private individual or the corporation earning a financial reward for efficiency and enterprize.

These views and the policies in which they were expressed were rather those of a cool, mature, experienced and somewhat disillusioned man of affairs than of a young representative of a frontier people, discontented, radical in their opinions, who looked to the new government for startling innovations in which there would be instant solutions for the difficulties and problems of the West. This divergence between expectation and reality gave opportunity to elements in the party which on various grounds were discontented—men disappointed about patronage or resentful because Mr. Sifton had been preferred to others whose services to the party covered a longer period, not to over-



look aspirants to office themselves who found Sifton in the seat to which they aspired—to promote disunion in the party. The young minister soon found his position challenged by an insurgent movement directed from Winnipeg, to which elements of support throughout the west were attracted; and during his first parliament he found it necessary to give much of his time and energy to vindicating his policies, and establishing his right to the western leadership of his party.

#### IV

About the tariff revision of 1897 there has always been controversy. By writers on Canadian economic matters, holding the views set out by Edward Porritt in his various books, it has always been regarded as the great apostasy. After eighteen years of vigorous resistance to the National Policy tariff of 1879, the Liberals, upon the first opportunity given them to give expression to their own views, accepted, in effect, the policy they had for so long denounced. This is, in brief, the indictment preferred against the Laurier Government. George E. Foster, who had been Minister of Finance in the preceding Conservative Government, hailed the Fielding tariff as a surrender to protection. "To-day, in this parliament, as between the two parties there is," he said, "practically no difference upon the expediency of the principle of protection as the guiding principle of our fiscal system." The assumption behind this charge is that while the Mackenzie tariff of  $17\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. was a revenue tariff only, the Fielding tariff, which might roughly be described as a 25 per cent. tariff, was protectionist. No one, however, has ever been able to define with authority at what particular point in the ascending rate of duties a tariff ceases to be one for revenue only, "with incidental protection," and becomes primarily protectionist. Mr. Sifton, on various platforms after 1897, made a very good job of his attempt to demonstrate that, having regard to differing

conditions the Fielding tariff was just as much for revenue as the Mackenzie tariff was. He could as easily have turned the argument the other way and urged that, again making allowance for a difference in conditions, the Mackenzie tariff gave about as much recognition to the principle of protection as did the Fielding tariff.

The fact is, that protection entered into the Canadian fiscal system when Galt revised the tariff in 1859; and it has been there ever since, though the extent of the content has varied from time to time. One of the reasons given by the United States for the cancellation of the Marcy-Elgin reciprocity agreement was the imposition by Canada of protective duties against United States manufactures. Though much of Mr. Porritt's writing is directed towards creating the impression that Canada was a free trade paradise until Satan entered in, in the form of the Tilley tariff of 1879, he is on record as admitting that there were protective features to the 1859 tariff, and that these had a good deal to do with the destruction of the reciprocity agreement.<sup>1</sup> A tariff can be made an instrument for raising revenue without any employment of the protective principle, by the simple expedient of levying countervailing excise taxes; but any tariff which gives the domestic manufacturer an advantage over his outside competitor, by forcing the latter's

<sup>1</sup>Writing in the *Political Science Quarterly* for June 1917, Mr. Porritt said: "After the Elgin-Marcy treaty had been in operation for four or five years, one of several objections raised against it at Washington was that its spirit had not been observed in Canada—that the United Provinces in 1858-59 had adopted protective tariffs with a view to the exclusion of manufactures made in the United States. Between 1866 and 1874 it was realized at Ottawa that there had been a basis for this objection." H. L. Keenleyside in his *Canada and the United States* has this reference (page 299): "The argument most frequently used by opponents of the treaty in the United States was that Canada had violated the spirit of the agreement by raising her duties on manufactured articles, thereby hurting American trade. What had really happened was that Canadian manufacturers had been slowly growing, and, fearful of extermination unless protected against their larger American rivals, they had demanded, and in 1858 and 1859, received tariff assistance."



wares to climb a wall, is built upon the theory of protection. It was such a tariff that, as everybody knew in advance, the Liberals would place upon the statute book in 1897; and while there were members of parliament and outside supporters who chose to disguise its protective features by claiming that it was being reduced to a "tariff for revenue" level, there could not have been, as there is not now in retrospect, any doubt in any intelligent mind, as to the nature and scope of the Fielding tariff.

The tariff of 1897 was a low tariff; it embodied a re-adjustment of taxation on lower levels; and it was skilfully devised to achieve certain ends to which the Liberal Government was committed: To promote domestic and foreign trade; to make free or bear as lightly as possible upon the necessities of life; to promote freer trade, particularly with Great Britain and the United States. It was successfully contended by the government, in parliament and before the people, that the tariff revision met these engagements. There were estimates, roughly accurate, that taking the total volume of importations, there was a reduction of ten per cent. in the duties collected. The interests of the farmers were served by transferring to the free list articles largely used by them—binder twine, barb wire and other fencing, Indian corn, cream separators. Agricultural implements, except binders and mowers, which were left at twenty per cent., were reduced all along the line from thirty-five per cent. to thirty per cent. or, in some cases, to twenty-five per cent. Raw material for manufacturers was cheapened by reductions in iron and steel. And there was of course the remarkable innovation of the minimum tariff intended to apply only to British goods, and made effective by the prompt denunciation by Great Britain of her trade treaties with Germany and Belgium. This reduced the rate of duty on goods that could be got in Great Britain by one-fourth,

and this proportion was increased to one-third in 1900. This by one stroke furthered two of the Liberal purposes: it reduced tariff taxation, and it increased British trade.

Much could be said in favour of this tariff; but it could not be said of it that there was in it no provision designed to help an industry or safeguard the interests of a locality. Provisions of this sort could easily be identified. There went to the making of it the tug and pull of opposing interests. Ministers, in what they regarded as the interests of their particular sections, sought for reductions or fought for the retention of duties, not on the ground of fiscal theories, but on the basis of political advantage. Into the making of any tariff, which is intended to control, to encourage, to direct, to deflect trade, these considerations must enter; and the motives which actuate the makers of such a tariff, seeking to enlist the powers of the State for the attainment of a desired objective, are closely akin to—where indeed they are not identical with—frankly protective demands.

Mr. Sifton had no illusions about the tariff making of 1897. He knew that it would be a conflict between contending interests; and that in the end it would be a compromise. He asked for things that he thought would be of service to the west; for the removal of duties on articles of general consumption; and where this was not obtainable, for the reduction of duties as in the case of the smaller agricultural implements and coal oil. And further, as his correspondence shows, he favoured the retention or increase of duties, or the imposition of new duties if he thought the effect would be to help along the development of the west, which was his prime concern. To a Liberal friend in Winnipeg who was interested he writes, on February 18th, 1897: "I am personally strongly opposed to the abolition of the duty on wheat and flour, and I will fight that question all



the way through. At the same time there may be some reduction."

Early in April, upon the eve of his departure for the west he sends Laurier a memorandum on the tariff which was due to be announced within a week. He thinks the government should seriously consider putting a prohibitive export duty on sawlogs and pulpwood. "I think the position of affairs for some years past has been a great reflection upon our legislation. Immense quantities of logs, as you know, have been taken in Michigan and cut up in Canadian mills. They have taken our property and population as well, and I believe the country would back us in endeavouring to bring about a different state of things." But his most original suggestion was that it might be advantageous to put up the duties on agricultural products coming into Canada from the United States. He recalls that he had already brought up the question. "I know," he says, "that it came as a shock to some of the members of Council." The immediate object he has in mind is preserving the markets of southern British Columbia for the products of the prairies. "Building the railway to the mining regions of British Columbia and doing anything we can to get the trade of the country and prevent it from going southward, we should also help ourselves by the tariff law as much as possible." He is not insistent upon the point, but he is quite earnest in suggesting that the duty on cattle should not be left at twenty-five per cent. when the duty on Canadian cattle going into the United States had just been raised in the Dingley tariff to forty per cent. "I hope," he says to Mr. Laurier, "the free trade theory, which has been already shattered, will not be permitted to stand in the way when it is plainly not in our business interests."

There were, but the reductions were inconsiderable. The duty on wheat was reduced from fifteen cents a bushel to twelve cents a bushel, while the duty per barrel of flour came down from seventy-five cents to forty cents.





the Dominion. It was not possible for everybody to be satisfied. Ontario and British Columbia were displeased because lumber was on the free list. Manitoba wanted free implements. There must be a spirit of compromise among the members of the party if there was to be a Liberal party in Canada. If the wishes of all its supporters had not been fully carried out the government had nevertheless done the best it could. The tariff had achieved the purposes for which it was framed. It had reduced taxation, lightened the burdens on the necessities of life, and promoted domestic and foreign trade. The farmers had benefitted from the lower duties on implements, and from the cheapening of raw materials to the manufacturers. "Some gentlemen will not be satisfied that we have not reduced the duty on binders and mowers. I should like to see the tariff on these items at the lowest possible point, but if any action in reducing the duty were to result in the destruction of the Canadian factories you would be altogether at the mercy of the American factories. You cannot get machines cheaper by removing all possible competition."<sup>1</sup> There was, moreover, a clear dividing line between Liberals and Conservatives. Conservatives were for a higher tariff; they had stated they would put the tariff up if returned to power. The Liberals were for a low tariff. If the electors voted against the Liberals, whatever their grounds, they voted in reality for a tariff higher than that framed by the Liberals with which some of them were dissatisfied.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Compiled from an address to the Liberal Convention at Brandon, March 2nd, 1900; and from his speech accepting nomination for Brandon constituency, September 1900. From reports in the *Manitoba Free Press*.

<sup>2</sup>This argument was much used in this election, as it has been since, upon occasion. Replying at this time to a letter from a Manitoba Liberal, sharply critical of the government, Mr. Sifton wrote:—"I am perfectly aware that the action of the government on the question of tariff is not satisfactory to the Liberals of Manitoba, but I think that those of our friends who are capable of understanding a question of this kind ought to endeavour to show the rest of them that they cannot gain anything upon the tariff question by voting in favour of a party which says we have gone too far and declares that it will undo what we have done the first chance it gets."

The Liberal revolt, though carefully stage-managed and vigorously pushed in Winnipeg, turned out to be less serious than it, at the outset, gave promise of being. It ceased to make any particular appeal to the public when it became too closely identified with Joseph Martin's obvious desire to revenge himself on the Laurier Government, and with the griefs of R. L. Richardson, M.P. who, after giving an uncertain and critical support for two sessions, definitely broke with the government and made war upon it in person and through the *Tribune*, of which he was the editor and chief owner. This defection in the newspaper world was counter-balanced by a friendly attitude on the part of the *Free Press*, which foreshadowed its future as a newspaper having close business and political relations with Mr. Sifton.

But there could not be a quarrel of these proportions in the family without consequences. From them the Greenway government, in its capacity as by-stander, was the principal sufferer. The anti-Sifton forces turned on Mr. Greenway and helped to defeat his government in the election of December 1899. The Federal political situation in Winnipeg was so disturbed as the result of the division of the party into two camps, that in the by-election in February 1900, occasioned by the death of R. W. Jameson, no candidates recognized by the government, contested the seat; and the Labour candidate (A. W. Puttee) was elected over an independent Liberal.<sup>1</sup> But Sifton's position throughout

<sup>1</sup>In letters to J. S. Willison, editor of the *Globe*, who had asked for information, Sifton discussed the situation in Winnipeg, where the Liberal association had been captured by the anti-Sifton faction, who had turned up in unexpected force at the annual meeting. He wrote that there were a number of formerly active Liberal workers in Winnipeg who for a variety of reasons "hate me like the devil hates holy water. They were all great pushers for Joe Martin, who was their ideal of what a public man ought to be." The regular element, he said, had allowed themselves to be bullied. Later on, when conditions in Winnipeg showed no improvement, he wrote further to Willison: "So far as Winnipeg is concerned it is a discouraging place and always was, but I would not fret about it. I think it will come around all right. If it does not we can always have the satisfaction of consigning it to a warmer place."



the west was in no way shaken by these developments. By this time his developmental programmes were in full operation and were beginning to yield results; and there was full acceptance of him, not only by the great majority of the Liberals, but by many electors who had not hitherto been associated with the party, as emphatically the right man to speak for the west at Ottawa.

Nevertheless there was throughout the West, unformulated in words, a vague feeling of dissatisfaction over the Liberal tariff. It did not register itself in political action, but it tended to strengthen an attitude of questioning and doubts which was beginning to form in the minds of westerners. The tariff had not been cut to the degree desired by the West because the East would not permit it; both political parties listened to the East and obeyed. This would have to be changed some day; something would have to be done about it. And so the seed was sown that, fructifying silently and slowly through the years, was in the course of time to come to harvest. But this was as yet far in the future.

## V

One of Mr. Sifton's first legislative acts upon becoming a Dominion Minister was to play the part of constitutional emancipator to the Northwest Territories. The four Northwest Territories—Alberta, Saskatchewan, East and West Assiniboia—were organized and administered as a Crown Colony; the Lieutenant-Governor was the executive agent, with a council partly nominated, partly elected. There was a provision by which the elected members grew in number as the population increased: and by 1887 the elected members represented a large majority of the members. Thereupon the Dominion Government abolished the Council, and created an elective assembly of twenty-five members; but it still sought to control the administration through the Lieutenant-Governor, who was regarded by it as in charge

of the distribution of the public moneys, most of which came from the Federal Treasury in the form of a grant. In the North-West council a group of the elected members, prominent among whom were Frank Oliver, James H. Ross and J. G. Turriff—all of them destined to much wider political careers—had been carrying on a campaign for wider powers of self-government; and with the formation of the Legislative Assembly the battle began in real earnest. There soon emerged as leader of the reforming element Fred W. G. Haultain, a newly elected member. The history of the next few years is not unlike that of Upper Canada in the fight for responsible government. By 1892 the reformers, under Haultain and Ross, had definitely established responsible government within the circle of a Dominion act which provided for no such form of government, by creating a parliamentary situation which could be handled in no other way. From 1892 onwards Haultain was accepted as premier of the Territories, responsible to the assembly.

In the Dominion session of 1897 the situation was regularized by an act promoted by Clifford Sifton. The executive committee which had been functioning as a government was recognized as an executive council, with salaried members, and its functions were defined to be "to aid and advise in the government of the territories." Thus ended a ten years struggle by the Territories for rights of self-government. Thereafter, Mr. Haultain as Premier of the Territories, and Mr. Sifton as Minister of the Interior had intimate relations as co-workers in the economic and constitutional development of the Territories. When, largely by reason of these activities, the time for fully enfranchising the Territories came, both Mr. Haultain and Mr. Sifton suffered political shipwreck by reason of the form in which the emancipating legislation was cast by Sir Wilfrid Laurier—an ironic illustration of the truth of the adage that virtue has often to be its own reward. Upon Sir Clifford Sifton's death Mr. Haultain



(then Sir Frederick Haultain, Chief Justice of Saskatchewan)  
bore tribute to his services in these terms:

"From 1896 to 1905 I had continuous dealings with him as Minister of the Interior in connection with Territorial affairs, mostly in relation to the Territorial subsidy, and particularly to changes in the North-West Territories Act bringing about the gradual development of self-government in the territories. I always found him very much in sympathy with our aspirations in that respect, and the most satisfactory member of any federal government I had to deal with in the important period from 1892 to 1905; prompt and decisive in saying "yes" and equally prompt and decisive in saying "no". His administration of the Department of the Interior at a very critical time in the history of the West, in my opinion, will entitle him to be considered the ablest minister who ever held that important portfolio."

## CHAPTER FIVE

### POLICIES OF DEVELOPMENT

"He believed in the possibility of a commercial policy. The doctrine of *laissez faire* did not appeal to him. The effort, it is true, can only come from the individual, as the sap can only come from the soil: but the direction of effort, if it is not to run to waste, must come from elsewhere. There are things desirable in commerce too big, and by their nature, impossible, for private citizens to achieve even in combination. He contended that a commercial policy in a positive and not in a negative sense was necessary, in the circumstances of the case."—*F. S. Oliver: Alexander Hamilton.*

CLIFFORD SIFTON took to Ottawa a clear idea of what, in his opinion, ought to be done if Canada was to escape from the doldrums in which the country had for years been becalmed. The first thing to do was to settle the empty West with producing farmers; this was also the second, third, fourth and fifth thing to do. Solve the problem of how to get people of the right kind into the West and keep them there, and the problem of national development was also solved; if the West remained empty every expedient to restore prosperity would be futile. The young minister carried his enthusiasm and his confidence in his ability to achieve his ends to Ottawa; and he impressed his colleagues to the extent that they gave him a free hand, and supplied without question the money that he demanded. Mr. Sifton had indeed made this a condition of entering the government; but his colleagues fulfilled the conditions in no grudging spirit. In his public addresses he acknowledged this co-operation by his colleagues, and admitted that if he failed, his would be an unshared responsibility. "The attitude of his colleagues", Mr. Sifton told a Winnipeg audience "was that he should go ahead. The money voted had been



the money he had asked for. More would have been voted if he had seen fit to ask for larger sums." His colleagues gave him everything but faith in the practicability of his plans. In a public address in 1908, when he was a private member of Parliament, he said: "I never had but one idea when I went to Ottawa. I believed that western Canada was as fine a country as existed in the world, and I determined that a change must be made. Nobody thought that I could make that change. My colleagues did not believe that I could, and they did not believe in the methods that I adopted; nor did my opponents believe in them. I had my own opinions, and I backed my own opinions."

The first thing to do was to so change conditions in western Canada that the settlers already there would be content to stay, and that the newcomers upon arrival would be satisfied. This involved a change in government policy to ensure a future supply of land for the hoped-for immigrants; the re-modelling of regulations which governed the relations between the individual settler and the government; and the re-organization of the department. There was an illimitable supply of land in the West, but much of it was fenced off from the settler. The government during the preceding eighteen years had been lavish in dowering railway projects with land grants; in order to have this land available for selection upon the completion of the railway thus helped, large tracts of land were reserved. "The problem that presented itself to me when I was sworn in as Minister of the Interior," Mr. Sifton told the House of Commons on May 31st, 1906, "was this: From the international boundary line to nearly one hundred miles north of Edmonton, from the boundary of Manitoba to the Rocky Mountains, the whole fertile belt was looked upon as railway reserves. In so far as every tract of land in the whole North-West which was considered to be fairly fit for settlement was concerned, it was covered with reservations of

some kind in favour of railway companies." The railway companies, when they earned their land grant, were in no hurry to make selection, because once the land was transferred to them it became liable for provincial and municipal taxation. Up to that time out of these reservations only 1,825,433 acres had been patented, although at least 24,000,000 acres of land had been fully earned. The policy of giving land grants to railway companies was stopped; and pressure was immediately applied to force the railways to go ahead with their land selections.<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Sifton's description of the Interior department as a department of circumlocution in which business could not be done has already been quoted. Immediately upon taking office he set himself the task, in his own words, of redeeming the department from its well-known condition. There was in the department a vast conglomeration of records and files dealing with grievances of settlers and difficulties of individual homesteaders; and his first drastic act was to change the procedure under which this mountain of red tape had accumulated. He centralized the administration of the department by abolishing the Land Board at Winnipeg, and transferring its functions to an official in Ottawa. The idea behind this creation of the Land Board had been admirable; it was that a board, near at hand, would deal with difficulties arising from the administration of the land laws, with promptitude and understanding. But there was left out of the calculation an understanding of the ingenuity of the bureaucratic mind, in making the documents in a case more important than the case itself. While the man on the land or wishful to go on the land waited with patience for a decision, or impatiently packed his kit and departed, Ottawa and Winnipeg played battledore and

<sup>1</sup>This policy was so steadily pursued that when Mr. Sifton retired in February 1905 there remained only odds and ends of land grants awaiting selection. During Mr. Sifton's term as Minister 22,478,013 acres of railway grant lands were patented.



shuttlecock with his case. "There was correspondence between the local land office and the Land Board in Winnipeg; from the Land Board to the Head Office in Ottawa; correspondence backwards and forwards, and forwards and backwards, until the men dealing with the matter would lose track of it altogether, and there were piled-up files in the department dealing with those disputes and nothing was done."<sup>1</sup>

James A. Smart, Sifton's former fellow-townsmen and colleague in the Greenway government, a man of great administrative ability, became the new Deputy Minister, the former deputy becoming the new Land Commissioner; and a determined onslaught was made on the arrears. Mr. Sifton is on record as saying that it took two years to deal completely with these accumulations.

To expedite action in the case of difficulties that might arise in the future a shift was made from a policy which relied upon rigid and specific regulations, to a system which made the Department a sort of special providence for the settler. Matters that formerly had to be dealt with by Order-in-council were turned over to the minister, and there were progressive amendments to the Dominion Land Act which enlarged the discretionary powers of the officials. Some years later, when a tremendous onslaught was staged in Parliament upon what was called, by the opposition, "Siftonism", this taking over of power, this widening of the range in which discretion could be used was set out in detail and an attempt made to give a sinister interpretation to the change. Mr. Sifton made no apologies; he admitted that this had been done and he gave the reasons for it (House of Commons, May 31st, 1906):

"The whole trend of the argument on the other side of the House is this, that the Minister must not have any discretion, the officers of the department must not have any

<sup>1</sup>Clifford Sifton in the House of Commons, May 31st, 1906.

discretion; but you should have some fixed automatic rule which under certain circumstances would close men out of their homestead right. There is to be no humanity about administration of the law—no means of looking into the case and exercising discretion as to whether the man should be shut out of his homestead, right or not. It is impossible to have a fixed rule laid down, that without giving a man a hearing would compel you to take away his homestead right. The thing is unthinkable; it is absurd."

The intent of this policy of taking power can perhaps be illustrated by one change which gave rise to a good deal of discussion—the taking by the Minister of power, by order-in-council, to fix at his discretion the price of land where it was bought for settlement purposes. Mr. Sifton had hardly taken office when there was a drive to induce him to restore second-homesteading, which the preceding government had tried and abandoned. The Minister would not hear of this. To an insistent member he wrote in March, 1897:

"In my opinion the first change in the law permitting second homesteading of any description was a frightful blunder, and the next change which permitted settlers to homestead their pre-emptions was a still worse blunder. I think that if the country gives a man a quarter-section free and a pre-emption for \$2.50 per acre, it has done for him all that he can expect, and the curse of the country in the district where I have been living has been the encouragement given to the idea that if people kicked long enough and hard enough they could get any kind of concession, whether reasonable or unreasonable, if they were willing to support the government. I think it would be a great mistake to change the law."

But to cover the case of deserving parties who sought to retrieve earlier mistakes or misfortunes by a second-homestead, Mr. Sifton took power to sell land at a nominal figure. "Where," he told Parliament, "I was satisfied that a man was deserving, who had exhausted his homestead right and wanted to get a farm for business, I said 'I will



sell him the land at \$1 an acre'." This land was sold subject to homestead conditions.

The result of this policy was, as he further informed the House, that "you will find whole lists of land granted to this man, that man and the other man in lots of 160 acres, just enough to make homes for themselves and their families, and the price fixed at a low figure, especially for the reason that the men in these conditions were the last in the world who could afford to pay a higher price." He was not interested, he explained, in getting a high price. "It was rather to settle the land, believing that the best policy for promoting the prosperity of the country."

Settle! That was the keyword of the whole programme. If a man would settle on the land and seriously devote himself to the business of production, the whole department of the Interior, from the Minister down to the youngest office boy, was at his service. If he was a white man, in both senses of that word, he could come from anywhere in the world and he was made welcome, and put to work with no questions asked as to his race, his religion, his language or his previous conditions of servitude. The regulations of the Department and its organization were all directed towards putting the individual John Doe on 160 acres of land, keeping him there, making his conditions of life tolerable, supplying him with railway facilities; and then multiplying the performance a countless number of times. Under the previous system John Doe, if he got into trouble, would have been simply Case number 785, and the pretext for the collection of a number of choice departmental documents—reports, counter-reports, observations, discussions about the law and what not. But under the new regime John Doe was a human being and a valued customer; and in the practices of the department there was an approximation to the retail business philosophy that the customer is always right.

One can note the new spirit in the new regulations, large and small. Young men taking up homesteads could fulfil residence conditions by living at home. Where a homesteader was in debt for seed grain, this no longer prevented him from getting his patent; it was issued with an endorsement as to the indebtedness. Local agents could authorize secondary parties to act for intending homesteaders, an authority previously obtainable only on application to the head office. Sub-agents of the department were appointed in every developing district, with authority to receive applications for homestead entry, homestead patent, hay permits, timber permits, thus saving the settler both time and expense. The departmental procedure was directed towards getting patents into the hands of settlers at the earliest possible date. Once a settler had the patent for his land he was in a business sense enfranchised; his farm became a credit instrument. Members of the Mounted Police were a bit surprised—until they got used to it—at being, upon occasion, requisitioned to make a trip over the prairie trail to deliver patents to settlers in some outlying district, far removed from postal facilities.

This change in the auspices under which the homesteader set about his arduous nation-building task of turning the bald high prairie into waving wheat fields had results not far short of magical. The homesteader on the land became content; and the door to the West, thus made ready, stood open to the home seekers of the world. They began promptly to arrive; at first in isolated units, then in groups, rising steadily to a tide that put a foundation of population into every accessible district. The empty West of Edward Blake's lamentations was empty no more.

## II

Mr. Sifton showed caution in his advance statements about the immigration policies he proposed to inaugurate.



He did not go beyond saying that people were urgently needed in the West, that they could be got and that he proposed to get them. In the months following his acceptance of office he kept hammering out his plans in conjunction with the officials of his department. By April 1897, when he spoke in Winnipeg, he was a trifle more specific in his statements. He was already impressed with the possibilities of getting settlers in the western states, though his hopes were centred chiefly upon the repatriation of Canadians. The question of European immigration, he told his Winnipeg audience, was being considered and would be gone into fully with the High Commissioner in London during the recess. He threw out the hope that a Swedish immigration, paralleling that which had populated Minnesota, might be obtained. The Canadian immigration service had already been reorganized, he said, to give the incoming immigrants direction, advice and a measure of supervision.

The only kind of immigration in which the Department was officially interested was that of men anxious to go on the land and equipped by inclination and experience for rural life; other immigration, while welcome, could take care of itself. A study of the situation was made and certain deductions drawn with a view to framing a policy. It was recognized that the British immigrant was the most desirable, but with only one million people all told engaged in agricultural pursuits in Great Britain no great flood of immigrants could be looked for from that source. An organization thoroughly to canvass that country for recruits was, however, carefully built up. Agencies were opened at strategic points, and these positions were filled chiefly by successful western farmers who, originally, had been British immigrants. Other successful western farmers of British birth were sent back to their native counties to spend their winter months in telling their friends and former neighbours of the opportunities in Western Canada.

Literature, with an original and striking appeal, was

distributed. One such publication, which proved most effective, was the reproduction in facsimile of letters from British farmers in Western Canada detailing their experiences. In a letter to Sir William Van Horne, in July, 1897, Mr. Sifton explained the purpose of this publication: "The idea was to impress the ordinary farmer with the sense of reality, in contrast with the usual advertising methods in which glowing statements are printed while there is no guarantee of their genuineness. The letters and statements are all *bona fide*; they have been selected from several thousand which were available. Care has been taken, moreover, to see that the statements which have been selected are fair samples, not too favourable." Resourcefulness, foreshadowing the publicity method of later days, was shown in getting news articles about Canada and its opportunities into the British periodicals. Writers and newspapermen who showed an interest in Canada were encouraged to visit the country, the department acting as guide and host. Later personally conducted parties of newspaper correspondents were brought out and taken through the country.

The ordinary traveller was not overlooked; if news of his movements came to the ear of the immigration scouts in Great Britain, courtesies and attentions were offered him as he passed through the country. One of the Canadian agents in Wales, much taken by a bright young member of parliament, induced him to spend the parliamentary recess in Western Canada, where the immigration department took pains to show him the bright side of things. The young man was impressed with the country, and everyone who met the young man was impressed by him. As well they might be; his name was David Lloyd George. Recalling his immigration methods many years later Sir Clifford wrote in *MacLean's Magazine*, April 1st, 1922:

"In Great Britain we confined our efforts very largely to the North of England and Scotland, and for the purpose of sifting the settlers we doubled the bonuses to the (steam-



ship) agents in those districts and cut them as much as possible in the South. The result was that we got a fairly steady stream of people from the North of England and from Scotland; and they were the very best settlers in the world."

From the very beginning Mr. Sifton had his eye on the United States as a country from which desirable settlers could be drawn. This was wholly original with him; it had not occurred to anybody else that from the United States to which the landless of the world were trekking, immigrants for Canada could be obtained.<sup>1</sup> The methods followed were not unlike those adopted in the case of Great Britain. Offices were opened at centres in the Western States; advertisements directing enquiries to these agencies were placed in every worth-while rural newspaper in the Western States; the agencies were manned by the "liveliest" young men that could be obtained. The general direction of United States immigration was given to a travelling inspector, who was ever on the road. As early as July, 1897, Mr. Sifton recorded the beginning of the American movement. "We are getting," he noted in a letter, "a considerable number of good settlers from the United States and the prospects are that there will be an increase." It was discovered by the Canadian agents that the rural editors in the United States were much given to associating themselves in county, State or wider organizations, for the purpose, among other things, of having an annual jaunt. Prompt advantage was taken

<sup>1</sup>"An incident that shows how up to date is the management of the Immigration Department is shown by the action taken when the Indian reservation in Oklahoma was being thrown open for settlement. Thousands of people began to gather in the vicinity of the reserve as the day for opening arrived. It was well-known only a small portion of them could get any land, so Canadian government officials were sent to the place where the thousands were gathered. A big tent was pitched and the anxious homeseekers told by lecture and by literature that Canada was prepared to give all of them a free homestead of better land than they were struggling for. Hundreds were thus attracted to the Dominion." *Liberal Literature campaign*, 1904.

of this custom, and editors and their wives by the trainload were given the opportunity of surveying and noting the charms of "the last West."

Land-seekers in the United States were highly sceptical of the claims made by Canada's agents, that land comparable to the highly-priced land of the Western States could be got in Canada by homesteading, or purchased for a song. Wheat in sheaves had to be kept on display in the agency offices to support the claim that it could be grown in that northern land. A more effective way of combatting scepticism was to organize land-seekers in small groups, and take them on a personally conducted tour throughout the Canadian West. The drive found its first response from people with a Canadian or British background; but once the movement got well under way the volume of immigration was a true cross-section of the population of the Western States. A smaller but efficient immigration organization was put to work in the New England States, to encourage repatriation of French Canadians who had been lured to the industrial centres of Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island by the hope of employment.

There was a third field to which the Minister of Immigration looked for stout backs and willing hands to aid in the great enterprise of breaking up the age-old prairie sod and putting it to the business of growing grain: the whole continent of Europe. A study was made of possibilities in that continent. It was found that Germany was practically closed to immigration work by restrictive laws; that for the comparatively limited emigration from the Scandinavian countries, Canada could not compete with the United States; that a limited number of immigrants could be got from Belgium and practically none from France. There remained Austria and Hungary, with the largest proportion of agriculturists to total population of any of the continental countries. There the pressure of the agricultural population upon



the means of subsistence was becoming so great that the government had been forced to relax its restrictive regulations, and for some years there had been considerable emigration of peasants from the province of Galicia to South America and the United States, with a slight spill-over to Canada.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Sifton was convinced that these people would make desirable settlers for Western Canada, and his agents went after them. In his own words, "I think a stalwart peasant in a sheep-skin coat, born on the soil, whose forefathers have been farmers for ten generations, with a stout wife and a half-dozen children, is good quality."

There were those who did not agree with this opinion. "The peasants in sheep-skin coats" became something of a battlecry in the next election.<sup>2</sup> To the embittered opponents of the government they were "Sifton's pets" or "the scum of Europe"; but Mr. Sifton never wavered then or thereafter in the belief that the Ukrainian population, which owed its presence in Canada to his activities, made a valuable contribution to the development of the West. The work of obtaining and selecting these immigrants was turned over to an organization of steamship and booking agents, with headquarters in Hamburg, which was known as the North

<sup>1</sup>The immigration of "Galicians" antedated the Sifton regime. In the report of the Canadian High Commissioner, who had general charge of immigration activities overseas, in 1893 there is a reference to Galician immigration as increasing. These people, though called "Galician" from the province from which they came, were Ukrainians, by which name they are now known.

<sup>2</sup>"The cry against the Doukhobors and Galicians is the most absolutely ignorant and absurd thing that I have ever known in my life. There is simply no question in regard to the advantage of these people. The policy of exciting racial prejudice is the most contemptible possible policy, because it is one that does not depend upon reason. You can excite the prejudice of one nationality against another by simply keeping up an agitation. You can excite the French against the English or the English against the French, or the Germans against the English. All you have to do is to keep hammering away and appealing to their prejudices, and in the course of time you will work up an excitement; but a more ignorant and unpatriotic policy could not be imagined." From a letter by Mr. Sifton, November 1901.

Atlantic Trading Company. The government paid this organization the regular bonus of five dollars for the head of every family accepted, and two dollars for the individual member, which had been for many years the custom of the department; this pretty well covered the cost of getting this immigration from central Europe. There was, of course, nothing in the nature of assisted passages.

It was this belief by the Minister that there was a place for the European tiller of the soil that made him respond so readily to the solicitation that Canada should find a home for the 7,400 Doukhobors, upon their expulsion from Russia in 1898. Count Leo Tolstoy was primarily concerned in the fate of these non-resistants; and associated with him in commending them to the consideration of the Canadian Government were the organized Quakers of both England and the United States. Count Tolstoy wrote to Canada that they were the best farmers in Russia; the British Consul at Batoum certified to their diligence and sobriety, by which they had brought prosperity to the barren localities in which they were originally settled; Lord Strathcona thought them likely to be an acquisition to Canada. A home was accordingly made for them, and by 1899 the colony had been transferred from the Caucasus to reserves in North-eastern Saskatchewan, where they proceeded to develop those peculiarities which made this experiment in practical philanthropy a doubtful success.<sup>1</sup>

To all this planning and outpouring of energy by Mr. Sifton and his assistants there was no immediate and startling response. It was hard to interest in Canada even people

<sup>1</sup>There is a detailed account of the negotiations with the Canadian government which led to a home being offered them in Canada in Professor James Mavor's Autobiography *My Windows on the Street of the World*, Volume Two, Chapter I. Professor Mavor, of Toronto University, carried on the negotiations with Mr. Sifton. In view of subsequent developments it is interesting to note that Count Tolstoy assured the Professor "that the people were not addicted to outbreaks of fanaticism and that there could be no doubt that they would be law abiding."



who were seeking homes. Canada was unknown to them; the name in those years meant nothing. But there was from the outset slight but encouraging signs that something was being accomplished from the joint policies of inducing immigration and encouraging colonization. Immigration increased from 20,000 in 1896 to 32,000 in the following year; the next year the figures were 44,000. The steady decrease in homestead entries which had been a feature of the years before 1896 stopped, and the process was reversed. There was a heartening increase of entries both by Canadians and immigrants; for the first three years they totalled 12,676, an insignificant figure in comparison with later recordings, but rightly held at the time to be full of promise. It was clear that the stream of immigration had set in and that it was rising in momentum and volume—the first ripple of the tide that was to flow. By 1900 the Laurier government, going to the people for a renewal of their mandate, could point to the success of the Sifton policy as one of the convincing reasons why they should be returned to office.

### III

Mr. Sifton, in his plans for furthering the development of the West, envisaged a steady enlargement of the railway mileage; but his views as to how this additional mileage should be obtained increased the disfavour in which he was held by the radical and insurgent element. He did not believe that it was desirable that the government should build railways as they were required; and, as he once said in addressing his constituents, this policy, if it were desirable, was not practicable, because the people of the East, who were in control, would not consent to public moneys being voted for these purposes. This meant that for additional service the people must look to the existing railway, or to new railways projected by private enterprise. He was in favour of railway competition, provided it came from pri-

vate roads; and he was prepared to encourage the needed extensions of existing lines or the appearance of new railways by cash subsidies under conditions. It was only by such means, in his opinion, that railway facilities in keeping with his settlement programme could be ensured.

To one who wrote him advising the complete abandonment of railway subsidies, Mr. Sifton made an emphatic reply: "I think for the Dominion to shut down on railway subsidies at the present time would be a suicidal policy. The country has now an opportunity which it has never had before of developing itself and getting population. My own view is that twenty years ought to see at least twelve million people in Canada, but if this result is to be accomplished, small ideas of trying to cut off expenditures on railways and public works will have to be dropped. For myself, I am altogether in favour of going ahead. I have not any fear of the result of expenditure which is necessary to meet the requirements of the case." Such a policy was most obnoxious to the doctrinaires who held that nothing could justify the payment of public moneys to railway corporations, those oppressors of the "common people."

The arrangement under which the Canadian Pacific Railway built the Crowsnest Pass Railway from Lethbridge into southern British Columbia was a typical application of Mr. Sifton's idea of the use to which subsidies to railways could properly be put. In keeping with the policy which he adopted, of not being much in evidence during his first session in parliament, he took no part in its advocacy in the House; but the arrangement was almost wholly his, and in the face of the fierce attacks made upon it he accepted full responsibility. There was in the West no doubt as to the need for this road; in Ontario there was some question of it. Southern British Columbia was developing into a mining camp. The expectations of its future were much higher than events justified; people spoke of it prospectively as the



greatest mining camp in the world. All the trade of this district was going south to the United States over a stub line which had been built north from the Northern Pacific system. Western farmers saw in this area a market for wheat, hay, oats, eggs, dairy products, all the output of the farms; coal owners in Southern Alberta foresaw a demand for coke for developing the mining properties of British Columbia. The merchants of Winnipeg looked forward to replacing St. Paul and Minneapolis as sources of supply. The nearest Canadian railhead was Lethbridge.

Three courses were open to the government: it could build the road itself: it could assist an independent company to build the road by giving it a subsidy; or it could deal with the Canadian Pacific. The Canadian Pacific officials refused to build the road as a matter of pure business, claiming that its construction was premature by years.

The government made an arrangement, having many new and unusual features, with the Canadian Pacific.<sup>1</sup> The government gave a subsidy of \$11,000 a mile for 330 miles of road. In return, the railway company made concessions in its freight rates over its main line system. There was to be a flat reduction of three cents per hundred pounds on wheat and flour from all points on their system on the prairies to Fort William; and westbound rates from points in the east were reduced from ten to thirty-three and a third

<sup>1</sup>Apparently there were also questions of high policy involved in this arrangement. In an open letter to the Press of Canada, dealing with railway questions, written by Sir Clifford Sifton in January, 1929, there appears this passage: "I remember when as a young minister in Laurier's cabinet, Van Horne and Shaughnessy said a line into the Kootenay mining district would not be considered for fifteen years. Also I remember that within six weeks the same two gentlemen came into my office and said they had to build this line and wanted a large bonus for doing it, that the C. P. R. was on the verge of bankruptcy. We gave them this bonus against the public sentiment of two-thirds of the people of Canada. They built the line and the Kootenay mining development saved the C. P. R., and saved a good many other things in Canada."

per cent. on a number of commodities of prime importance to western settlers: fruit, coal oil, binder twine, agricultural implements, many manufactures of iron, furniture, building paper, roofing felt, etc. These rates were set out in the schedule to the act; and thirty years later were held to be statutory, and therefore beyond control of the railway commission—a circumstance which is now worth about thirty million dollars yearly to the farmers of Western Canada in outgoing rates on grain. In addition, the government took power to grant running rights over the Crowsnest Pass road to other railways and also to control local rates. And there was a final provision of an unusual character. The Canadian Pacific Railway by building this railway, under the provisions of a British Columbia charter which it had acquired, would earn coal lands, the property of the province, to the extent of 250,000 acres; it was stipulated that 50,000 acres of the best of these lands were to be transferred to the Dominion Government, thus becoming public property. The possession of these lands, the government declared, would enable it, if necessary, to control coal prices.

Such was the Crowsnest railway arrangement, over which there was heated controversy for the next few years in Western Canada. It was attacked with fury by the Liberal insurgents. The points about it which particularly distressed them were the granting of money to the Canadian Pacific Railway, with which company they had long maintained a feud; and the securing by the railway corporation of these coal lands. The charge that the Dominion Government had given these lands to the company was persistently made; and upon the clear demonstration that this was purely a provincial matter some of the government's assailants, hardened veterans though they were of the anti-disallowance war in Manitoba, took the ground that the Dominion Government was culpable, because it had not pro-



tected the people of British Columbia against their own government by disallowing the charter of the British Columbia Southern Railway which authorized this grant.

In the plans which Mr. Sifton had for the West a large place was given to transportation matters. It was in keeping with his intentions that developing districts should be served that he sponsored the building of the Crowsnest Pass railway; but there was in his mind a wider, if not clearly defined vision of railway development to serve the West and Canada. "Nearly six years ago," he wrote to Honourable Charles Fitzpatrick, Minister of Justice, on December 14th, 1902, "I expressed the opinion to Sir Wilfrid that almost the only two problems of government which we had to deal with of a serious character, after the revision of the tariff, was the immigration question, the question of securing a large addition to the agricultural population of the West, and the transportation question, the question of getting their products to market. I said then, and I have not since altered my opinion, that to place a large producing population upon the western prairies and to inaugurate a system whereby the products of their labours should be brought to the seaboard through exclusively Canadian channels and shipped from Canadian parts, would of itself be enough glory for one government, and would bring such prosperity to the Dominion of Canada as to wholly transform the financial difficulties of the country." An extension of railway competition in the West in keeping with these views seemed to him desirable.

At this time, outside Manitoba where the Northern Pacific and Manitoba furnished a measure of competition, the Canadian Pacific, by itself or through subsidiary companies, supplied the transportation facilities of the West. There was, however, a small independent railway company—the Lake Manitoba Railway and Canal Company—which, with the assistance given it by the Manitoba Government,

had built a line of railway from Portage la Prairie into the Dauphin country. The men behind this enterprise, William Mackenzie and Donald Mann, had visions of extending it east and west. To this end they planned an extension from their terminus at Sifton westward through the Swan River country into the territories, under the title of the Canadian Northern Railway. They also acquired the Dominion charter of the Winnipeg and Southeastern Railway, carrying a land grant and the charter for the Ontario and Rainy River granted by the Ontario Legislature; between them these charters gave Mackenzie and Mann the power to build a railway from Winnipeg to Port Arthur.

Mr. Sifton was sympathetic to both these enterprises and was instrumental in getting help for them from the Dominion treasury.

Addressing a Winnipeg audience on October 25th, 1899, he said he was not in favour of having the country in the hands of one or two railway companies; the greater the competition the greater the result. It was for this reason that he was "in favour of the construction of the Ontario and Rainy River Railway from Port Arthur to the Lake of the Woods, from thence to Winnipeg, and on through Swan River and Saskatchewan valley to Edmonton and the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. The Swan River and Saskatchewan valleys were as fertile as any land the sun ever shone on, and as fast as they got railways the settlers would flock in." Bearing these facts in mind he had, he said, induced his colleagues to vote money to aid in the construction of the line from Port Arthur to Winnipeg, and for the extension of the railway for a distance of one hundred miles beyond the Swan River country. Provisions for control similar to those inserted in the Crowsnest Pass agreement were made. Amalgamation with or arrangements for pooling receipts with competing roads were forbidden; the government could fix the rates and grant running rights.



There was also a provision which was thereafter made universally applicable to railways earning money subsidies. Three per cent. on these subsidies could be employed as a set-off to charges for carrying the mails made by these railways. This meant in many cases the carrying of the mails at nominal rates. In his address in Winnipeg he strongly defended this arrangement as better than government ownership of the line between Winnipeg and Port Arthur, which had been alternatively urged. He contended that with the imposition of these conditions the public got all the advantages of ownership at very much less cost. Whereas it would cost at least ten million dollars to build the railway to Port Arthur, the road, built privately but subject to government control, would cost the public treasury only \$1,632,000. The course of the government would, he thought, commend itself to business men.

## CHAPTER SIX

### GOLD IN THE YUKON

Politics, as a practice, whatever its professions, had always been the systematic organization of hatreds.—*Henry Adams.*

**A**MONG the tasks which Mr. Sifton foresaw as necessary to be performed if western development was to be put upon a sure and permanent foundation, the administration of the Yukon was not included. This was an extra duty that descended, unheralded and unforeseen, demanding immediate and exacting consideration. It was in the autumn of 1896 that there came out from the remote north-west, the Klondike region of the Canadian Yukon, not far south of the Arctic Circle, authentic reports of the discovery of gold.<sup>1</sup> The discoveries were of the kind which have always led to "gold rushes." Gold in quartz formation is a business enterprise for the capitalist; but free gold which the individual can find, capture and carry off on his back, spells opportunity for the adventurous. The news that came out of the far north was that gold dust in large quantity could be recovered out of the shallows and the banks of the rivers and creeks flowing into the Yukon; and at the news

<sup>1</sup>It had been known since 1884 that there was free gold in small quantities along the rivers tributary to the Yukon, and there were placer diggings on a relatively small scale on Forty Mile River and Franklin Gulch, much further down the river than Dawson. The recording office for this earlier phase of the mining industry was at Fort Cudahy, at the mouth of Forty Mile River. Between 1884 and 1897 gold to the value of a million dollars was taken out of these placer diggings. George Carmack, on August 16, 1896, discovered coarse gold in quantities on Rabbit Creek, re-named Bonanza; he staked two claims, Discovery and one below Discovery; two Indians also staked claims. It was the filing of these claims at Fort Cudahy that started the Klondike rush.



people all over the world, of all grades of society, of all classes and conditions, dropped their work and began to pack their bags. All the elemental passions and desires sprang up at the call of "gold in the Klondike."

The reputed goldfields were in a remote, wholly unsettled sub-arctic country, hundreds of miles from the sea, from which it was separated not only by distance but by high mountain ridges difficult to surmount; a land without transportation facilities, except the rough trail for weary feet, and the raft upon the river. No matter; gold was there to be found, and from all parts of the world the seekers turned their faces to the land of hope. The year was not out before the first wash of the coming wave began to percolate through the passes in the hills and flow along the valley.<sup>1</sup> Captain Constantine, in charge of the small force which had for some years policed the territory, found himself swamped with his duties of mining commissioner, magistrate, administrator and police officer.

The problem of preparing and taking care of the rush was passed along to Ottawa; and the young minister found it waiting for him on his desk when he walked into his office in November 1896. With the certainty that there would be

<sup>1</sup>Of the tide of gold-seekers at its height there is a vivid description in *Early Days on the Yukon* by William Ogilvie, pages 277, 278 and 279: "The rush was wild, and hardly a rod of the dreary twenty-three miles over Dyea Pass but showed signs of some eager slave to the universal passion. Men and women, good and bad, adventurers and adventuresses, saints and sinners, simple and wise, cunning and guileless, strong and weak, healthy and sickly, rich and poor, young and old, clothed and ragged, women in their ordinary dress, women in part male and part female attire, and many entirely in male clothing—all mad with the common madness, nearly all wise in council for the common weal, many, many brutes in action for their own. Some sinking to lower than bestial shamelessness in conduct and association; and strangely, too, I was almost saying, but only consistently after all, some of the most degraded, degraded beneath decent designation, posed in Dawson as immaculate, and were the greatest censors of the government and public officials. Straggling along the route from tide water to the summit, fifteen miles away and two thirds of a mile above it, and from the summit to Lake Lyndeman, eight miles farther, and a fourth of a mile below it, was this motley crowd of many tongues and nations."

a rush through the passes the following season, creating all manner of problems, the business of preparing an organization to control the area and providing the necessary code for its administration became somewhat urgent. He worked as best he could in those crowded days, when so many problems pressed themselves upon him, and by mid-summer was able to suggest a policy and a system of organization which his colleagues accepted as adequate.

He was less fortunate with some of his political friends—again the clash between the hard-headed Minister with his business ideas and associates less practical in their understanding of the situation was in evidence. There were those who thought of the Yukon as a great permanent mining camp, which could be made an enduring source of wealth and revenue. Hence suggestions that the miners should have only leasehold rights and that the State should participate, through these leases and otherwise, in the wealth that was to be produced in unfailing volume. To the Minister policies of this kind seemed chimerical. To his mind the fate of other placer-mining fields would be the fate of the Klondike; it would be invaded by a flood of fortune seekers, and in the course of a short time it would be dug out. The reasonable thing to do was to let things take this course, getting some revenue out of the field by imposing a royalty; and securing for Canadian business houses the largest possible share of the resulting trade. He also favoured reserving a certain percentage of claims for the government. To a western Liberal member, who dissented from the government policy he wrote in August 1897:

“I am clearly and definitely of the opinion that the policy we have adopted is correct. I have lived among western people nearly all my life, and know their way of looking at things; and one of the principal ideas western men have is that it is right to take anything in sight provided nobody else is in ahead of them. As a rule, it is sound policy for the government to fall in with this idea and en-



courage the people to go ahead: but there are, of course, exceptions to be made. I have discussed this matter with a number of the most level-headed men in the country. We have not in the slightest degree lost our heads, nor do we affirmatively or negatively commit ourselves in regard to the extravagant statements which are made respecting the future outlook of the country. Time will show whether they are correct or not. In the meantime, having perceived good reasons for the policy we are following, we intend to adhere to it. The Yukon is not the same as any other gold-mining country in the world, and the difference consists in the fact that it is good for nothing except mining, which in all probability will be temporary."

There was nothing in the mining experience of Canada that helped the government in framing a policy for the Yukon. The mining regulations in force were wholly inapplicable. After collecting information about the placer-mining regulations of other countries, much of it by cable, none were found to fit the Klondike condition; and tentative regulations subject to change had to be drawn up. In the Klondike it was not a simple proposition of staking a claim in a country with easily recognizable and permanent landmarks. The richest gold-bearing sands were not in the open beds of the rivers, ready to yield themselves at once to the primitive processes of rocking and washing: they were buried in alluvial deposits, deep under clay and moss and bound by a frost unbroken for æons into a mass impervious to pick or shovel until disintegrated by the application of fire. The locations, of a given frontage, must range up and down the creek or gulch from the first location; the difficulties of staking and surveying claims in this featureless land of surface moss, frozen in winter and reeking with water in summer, it was foreseen, would be immense. Regulations would be needed providing for the recording of claims; declaring what constituted legal staking; delimiting areas in which claims should be staked; fixing royalty dues;

providing for transfers and sub-divisions—there was endless dickering and splitting up of claims.

After regulations which, it was hoped, would in some degree meet the necessities of the situation there was the problem of how the regulations were to be enforced and law and order maintained. The experience of half a century, covering a dozen countries, all went to show that a gold camp, even in areas comparatively accessible to the influence of government, tended to become the most lawless places on earth, where primitive conceptions of commercial morality and equally primitive methods of adjusting differences prevailed. What would happen in the Klondike, which was removed from Ottawa four thousand miles by distance, over a month by time, and to which not a policeman could be sent except through the territory and with the consent of another power? These were some of the things which the Minister of the Interior had to think about, while the angry patronage-hunters buzzed about his head, and a thousand other questions, arising out of the new policies of immigration and colonization, pressed for attention.

After deciding upon policies and drawing up tentative regulations the Minister looked about him for officials who would, in his judgment, be equal to the responsibilities that would be theirs. Cut off as they would be from contact with headquarters, they would have to be ready to deal with emergencies that might arise. Certain qualities they would need to have: vigour, great powers of endurance, physical courage, personal initiative, readiness to assume responsibility. Mr. Sifton did not believe that the civil service was a school for these virtues; and his judgment was rather confirmed by the fact that the one department of government in the Yukon which was entrusted to an official drawn from the regular service—the office of gold commissioner—was



the least successful in meeting the emergent demands of the situation that resulted when the great rush strained to the utmost all facilities of government. Major James M. Walsh, of Brockville, Ont., who, in the early days of the Northwest territories had made a great reputation as administrator and officer in the Mounted Police, at the solicitation of the Minister agreed, for the period of one year to take the Commissionership, with powers little short of dictatorial; Mr. Justice McGuire, of the Territorial bench, volunteered, at considerable sacrifice, to serve for a time as judge; and the official party was rounded out with appointees known personally to Mr. Sifton and chosen by him because he was confident that they had the qualities needed for service upon a turbulent frontier.<sup>1</sup> Much was heard, in the next few years of controversy, of the Yukon officials; but the subsequent career of many of them showed that their capacity and energy were not under-estimated by Mr. Sifton. Thus J. D. McGregor, who went in as Mine Inspector, became in 1929 Lieutenant-Governor of Manitoba; Fred C. Wade, the registrar, was widely known in later life as the highly efficient Agent-general of British Columbia in Great Britain, filling that position until his death in 1924; Dufferin Pattullo, after years of service in the British Columbia government, became leader of the Liberal party of that province in 1930.

The party of officials left Ottawa for the Klondike the last week of September, 1897. The chroniclers of the time reported that they were fitted out as for an Arctic expedition. "They are equipped with eiderdown quilts, wolf-robe sleeping bags, day and night mocassins; and they are each fitted with Colt revolvers of forty-five calibre, a precise and deadly weapon, and one hundred rounds of ammunition each.

<sup>1</sup>It was an emergency staff, appointed, as I have said, for the purpose of taking hold of matters as they might develop, and to be supplanted by a permanent staff when the development of the country indicated that such would be required.—Mr. Sifton in Parliament, 1899, *Hansard*, page 819.

These weapons will not be concealed but carried by a strap passing over the breast and back." A martial and imposing party indeed! And accompanying the party for the first stage of its journey into the northland was Clifford Sifton. There was still one problem for which no satisfactory solution appeared; the securing of a reasonably suitable avenue of entrance to Canada's new treasure field. It was to look over the ground himself, in the hope of reaching a decision as to what could be done to better a very unsatisfactory condition of things, that Mr. Sifton decided to make this journey.

## II

The question of routes to the Klondike was much in Mr. Sifton's mind as he studied his Yukon problem. In the summer and autumn of 1897 he was busy, personally or by agents, in seeking information about lines of approach to the gold-fields. There was, of course, the all-water way by sea and up the long stretch of the Yukon. Only one trip could be made up the river in a season. It was useful for supplies but much too slow for impatient prospectors. For them the most available and therefore the most used routes were by sea, to the end of Lynn Canal, thence over the height of land to the headwaters of the Lewes river which gave a direct, though somewhat dangerous access by water to the goldfields. Lynn Canal was a narrow deep fiord running almost due north for nearly a hundred miles from what the Canadian authorities held was the sea-coast; and it was the Canadian contention, that all that portion of Lynn Canal lying more than ten leagues from the sea belonged to Canada. But this belief did not affect the fact that the United States claimed all the inlet and the land for ten leagues inland, which ran beyond the height of land; and was in possession. At its head Lynn Canal was divided into two smaller inlets, on one of which the little port of



Skagway was situated, on the other Dyea. The road north from Skagway ran over the White Pass, from Dyea over the Chilkoot Pass; beyond the height of land they merged in a common route down the river. On the west side of Lynn Canal a little further south there was a water projection westward known as Pyramid Harbour; from it the circuitous Dalton trail set forth.

In October Mr. Sifton gave his personal attention to the Lynn Canal entrance. The government steamer *Quadra* landed the party of officials at Skagway on October 9th. There they found the Canadian Mounted Police, who had been made free of the territory by the United States authorities, struggling with a mass of supplies that had accumulated. One party had got over the pass with supplies and had gone on to Dawson; a second party had gone forward to open a port at Lake Tagish, just beyond the height of land; but there remained a great accumulation which, in company with the officials, had to be got over the mountains into Canadian territory before winter set in. Mr. Sifton decided to go in by one pass and come out by the other in order to have personal experience of both routes. In company with Major Walsh, William Ogilvie, an official of the department who already was extensively acquainted with the Yukon territory, Mounted Policemen, a party of Indians, packers, etc., he set out from Dyea and in four days reached Lake Bennett, having established posts on the way and made arrangements for the forwarding of supplies. He then went on down the river to Tagish, a two days' trip; here a customs post was opened. A party went on from there to White Horse rapids to open a post; but the Minister turned his face homeward. From Lake Bennett he proceeded over the White Horse Pass to Skagway, a three days' trip. There he found that a considerable amount of the supplies had gone forward; and the rest of the officials went north under

police escort on a month's arduous trip to Dawson. By November 1st Mr. Sifton was back in Vancouver.

Major Walsh and Mr. Sifton, while undergoing these experiences, came very definitely to the conclusion that the way to the Klondike via Lynn Canal and the passes had disadvantages of so serious a character that an alternative route, wholly Canadian in character, must be sought and found. From a study of the maps and from such information as was available to them, they saw a possibility of an all-Canadian approach by way of Lake Teslin. As the subsequent correspondence between the commissioner and the minister clearly indicates, this alternative project was their joint conception, fashioned during their conferences as they toiled over the passes or exchanged views around the night camp fires. Mr. Sifton, in an interview which he gave upon his return to Vancouver to the representative of the *Toronto Globe*, said it would be the aim of the government to open up as soon as possible a Canadian route, by means of which men and supplies could be conveyed without undue loss and hardship, at reasonable cost. He stressed the importance of having the needs of the Klondike supplied from Canadian sources. There would be, for years, work there for thousands of men, and the trade of that country would be extremely profitable. If retained in Canadian channels it would in many ways assist in developing the resources of the country.

The all-Canadian routes, which Mr. Sifton thus indicated he had in mind, would enter the Yukon territory at Lake Teslin, from which the Hootalingua River flowed into the Lewes, which in turn was tributary to the Yukon. From Lake Teslin to Dawson there was a clear waterway, save for easily removable obstructions at Five Finger Rapids. But if the going from Lake Teslin was easy, the difficulty of getting to Teslin was very great. Three routes to Teslin



were being tried out while Mr. Sifton himself was inspecting the Lynn Canal entrances. A party of Mounted Police was proceeding overland from Edmonton to decide whether an overland trail was practicable. It was the conviction of the Edmonton district, as expressed by its Press and its political representatives, that this was the only way; and to doubt its entire practicability was regarded as a species of treason.

Another party pushed northward from Cariboo in British Columbia to Telegraph Creek on the Stikine River. A party headed by Charles Jennings, an engineer, and Mr. St. Cyr, a surveyor, was carefully studying the Stikine River from the sea to Telegraph Creek, and the possibilities of a road or an electric railway from Telegraph Creek to Teslin Lake, which was only one hundred and fifty miles distant. The Stikine River entered the sea at Fort Wrangel in territory claimed and occupied by the Americans; but Canada had clear rights to navigation under the treaty of 1825 between Great Britain and Russia, which the United States had inherited.

The more Mr. Sifton looked at the map the stronger appeared the probability that the Stikine-Teslin route offered the solution. And his conviction grew stronger as difficulties continued to be put in the way of the passage of Canadian goods through the United States strip of territory on their way to a Canadian destination. Mr. Sifton found that to get Canadian goods through it was necessary either to pass them through the United States Custom Houses, or pay very heavy inspection fees to the United States Customs Officials. In practice Canadians found it cheaper and quicker, especially in the case of small personal outfits, to pay the customs duties and thus get full control of their goods. When Mr. Sifton got back to Vancouver and Victoria he was deluged with bitter complaints from the merchants of those cities about these practices, imposed in the

interest of Seattle, which was determined to capture the outfitting business of the new Canadian goldfields. He undertook to have representations made to the United States Government in the matter; and in the last week in December he went to Washington, where he arranged with the assistant secretary of the Treasury that regulations would be adopted at Dyea and Skagway which, in Mr. Sifton's words "would permit Canadian goods being bonded through or taken through, without such inspection fees being charged as would virtually prohibit the transmission of Canadian goods without payment of duty."

But weeks passed without these regulations being issued; and angry demands for reprisals continued to be made upon the government. Two specific proposals, retaliatory in character, were urged. The United States Department of War was planning to send an expedition, with provisions to the value of \$200,000, through Canadian territory for the relief of Americans in Alaska; and they asked the Canadian Government to pass this consignment without collecting duty. The Dominion Government was urged by commercial organizations to refuse this request. A little later the Victoria Board of Trade, with the backing of other commercial bodies including the Toronto Board of Trade, demanded that the Canadian police block the trails beyond the White Pass and the Chilkoot Pass against the entrance of Americans and American goods.

Mr. Sifton refused both requests, and in several letters to William Templeman of Victoria (then Senator, afterwards a member of the government) in January, he pleaded for more patience and appreciation of the difficulties of the situation on the part of British Columbia business men. He pointed out that apart from this difficulty about the free passage of Canadian goods, the United States Government had shown a friendly spirit of co-operation. They had established customs sub-posts at Dyea and Skagway upon



a telegraphed request. Canadian officers with police supplies had been crossing territory held by the Americans without even observing the formality of asking permission. It was absolutely essential that friendly relations should be preserved. "Our people at the coast seem to forget that every attack made upon the American government makes it all the more difficult for us to deal with them and secure satisfactory arrangements." He hoped that the Press (Templeman being owner and editor of the *Victoria Times*) would advise the people as to the difficulties of the situation and as to the need of discretion.

As for the suggestion to block the passes, "it would be an unprecedented and rather high-handed proceeding for which I do not think any precedent could be found in a free country in time of peace." Any suggestion of trouble of this kind on the frontier would put a stop to the whole movement to the Klondike, involving Canadian business in losses running into millions, whereas the conditions of which complaint was made, meant only the loss of outfitting a percentage of those who were proceeding to the Yukon. "I have brought the matter before the other members of the government. They all concur with my own view, which is that while everything possible should be done to secure the trade for our own country, yet in the interests of that trade hasty or violent action would be very inadvisable." He deplored the delay at Washington in putting the agreed-upon regulations into effect, attributing it to violent political pressure from the Pacific Coast and the sealing interests. On the day upon which he sent this letter to Senator Templeman he wrote to Lyman J. Gage, United States Secretary, drawing his attention to the delay in carrying out the arrangement and urging immediate action.

Experiences such as these strengthened Mr. Sifton in his belief that nothing but an all-Canadian route would meet

the situation. It was therefore in a spirit of jubilation that, on January 27th, he wrote to Major Walsh: "We signed a contract yesterday for the construction of a railroad from the Stikine River to Teslin Lake. The contract is in the hands of Messrs. Mackenzie and Mann, and they are to build a wagon road in six weeks, with stopping places every twenty-five miles, and have a railroad in operation by September 1st. You will be able to take a steamboat on the river next September and come out like a Christian." "The arrangements", he added, "are somewhat on the lines I discussed with you." To his colleague J. Israel Tarte, on the same day he despatched a memo urging him to ask for appropriations for improving navigation upon the Stikine and Lewes rivers. The project was a daring one, directed to a worth-while end; it called for speed and determination. It was therefore just the kind of an enterprise to make an appeal to him and he entered upon it with enthusiasm, little recking of the ambush that was waiting for him along the parliamentary road.

Major Walsh, from his intimate contacts with the problem of transportation, kept pressing for an all-Canadian route. He tarried on his way down the river on November 27th, to write a long letter to Mr. Sifton detailing what should be done. The government should build without delay a railway from Glenora or Telegraph Creek to Teslin Lake. "Then put flat-bottomed steamers on Lake Teslin, to run from the head to the foot of the lake, and to the junction of the Hootalinqua and the Lewes River, if navigation is practicable. At whatever point steamboat navigation ceases, establish a shipyard for the construction of flat-bottom boats or scows to descend the river to Dawson." He wanted the government to establish supply posts along the river and to administer them as part of the public service. "You may", he wrote, "consider this a strange sugges-



tion, that I should recommend the government to go into a commercial business, but if there was ever in the world a necessity for it, it is now."

From his winter headquarters on Big Salmon River, where he was caught by winter on his way to Dawson City, the Commissioner kept urging this route in repeated letters to the minister. On January 22nd he wrote:

"Captain Wood (of the Mounted Police) informs me that United States Customs officials at Skagway and Dyea are compelling the people coming into this district who have purchased their supplies in Canada, to pay duty on these supplies or to pay the officials six dollars per day and expenses, to escort the goods over the international line. These officials are appointed from the towns and cities along the United States coast, and are working and scheming continually in every possible manner to put the trade that our country is entitled to, into the United States coast cities and towns. Can nothing be done with the government at Washington to put a stop to these impositions?<sup>1</sup> I am convinced that so long as we have to depend upon a United States port for an entrance into this district, annoyances and unfair dealing will be continued, and the trade that should come to our country diverted to the United States. I think our government or our people, at any cost, should find an ocean port somewhere on the coast as soon as possible, with a road to the head of Lake Teslin, and secure for ourselves the business of this district. The duty of our government is not to grant any charters or privileges to any person for any railway, steamboat, telegraph or horse or wagon trails, from our southern boundary to the interior that can be connected with any point on the United States coast. We should reserve the outlet of this district for ourselves. . . . Let us find a harbour, if we have to go to Fort Simpson. It will have no competitor, and Skagway and Dyea will return to what they were a year ago."

Major Walsh, holding these views, was naturally de-

<sup>1</sup>The United States government finally got around, however, to implementing the agreement that Canadian goods should pass duty free through United States territory. Regulations to this effect were issued in March.

lighted to receive advices from Mr. Sifton that the government was going ahead with an all-Canadian road. He hoped it would be built the ensuing season. "Until we have it the district cannot be successfully governed nor can it progress as it should." Great was his disappointment when he heard that the project had been destroyed by the Senate. He wrote in his deep chagrin and wrath (April 11):

"It is an outrage that party prejudice can be permitted to commit so villainous an act. It is treason of the blackest kind. With a railroad and steamboat communication see what we would have had!—the business of the Yukon river from Teslin Lake to St. Michael, twenty-four hundred miles. Every dollar of it if properly handled can come to Canada."

### III

This was in brief the arrangement which Mr. Sifton, with the consent of his colleagues, made for the construction of an all-Canadian route to Dawson: Mackenzie and Mann, who were experienced in the rapid building of railways, were to build a railway of somewhat light construction (the standard being the Kaslo-Slocan road in British Columbia) from Telegraph Creek to Teslin Lake, a distance of one hundred and fifty miles, by September 1st. They would have the right later, by arrangement with the government, to extend the line south and west to a Canadian sea-port, and north to Dawson City. Their contract authorized them to build docks, smelters, etc. They were protected from competition from any railway projected into the Yukon from Lynn Inlet ports—that is, from territory owned by the United States. A winter road was to be built from the mouth of the Stikine River to Lake Teslin.

For the building of this road the company was to be given a land grant of 25,000 acres of land per mile in the territory through which it ran, which pretty completely excluded arable land. There were limitations to the right of



selection; they could not take the beds of rivers or lakes, and the claim had to be distributed over a large area; up to June 15th mining claims could be staked anywhere and these would be protected; there were provisions protecting settlers and guarding against freight discrimination. The railway company put up \$250,000 in cash as a guarantee that the conditions of the contract would be fulfilled.

In the fight which was put up in Parliament against this arrangement by the opposition, all the political conventions which govern this kind of a struggle were carefully observed. If any Canadian satirist ever wishes to write a Noodles Oration<sup>1</sup> for the use of an opposition, resisting a government proposition to build or assist in building a railway—any opposition, any government—he can readily find his material in that vast repository of talk, the *Canadian Hansard*. The lines of the attack are defined by usage and sanctified by tradition. First it must be urged that the building of the road is too early or too late. It illustrates either the nerveless timidity of an incompetent government, or the recklessness of an ignorant administration. (Both arguments can be employed in the same debate, but it is not advised that they be used by the same speaker, unless he has more mental agility than most parliamentary orators are dowered with). Then the route is all wrong; it either starts at the wrong place, ends at the wrong place or follows the wrong course. The parties to whom the building of the road is given are not the right parties. “Is not the government aware, Mr. Speaker, that the bankers of London, New York, Paris and Kalamazoo, in alliance with the engineers of Great Britain, the United States, Germany and Kamschatka are eager to build this railway, and given the opportunity are prepared to make a proposition which will save this country millions and rescue the people from the hands of the exploiters whom the government delight to honour?” Since

<sup>1</sup>See Sydney Smith's *Essays on Bentham's Book of Fallacies*.

the government cannot tear up the contract any alternative offer can be put in the most attractive light; while conversely, the arrangement, to which the government is committed, is to be painted in the darkest colours. Flagitious, corrupt, improvident, perfidious, knavish, faithless are words very suitable to be used. Any member of the opposition can be trusted to say that the treasury of the country is being robbed in order that means may be obtained for the debauching of the electors; but only those most skilful in the art of innuendo should be permitted to hint that there is a private and sinister explanation of the favouritism displayed by the Minister. By the use of some such formula an opposition running to interminable length can be offered, with the certainty that those who think ill of the government, for whatever reason, will regard the charges as gospel truth.

All these traditional arguments were employed with great gusto in the resistance offered to the Teslin railway project. In particular, great play was made with what was represented as the bestowal of a kingdom of gold upon the fortunate contracting pair. By a simple exercise in multiplication it could be shown that Mackenzie and Mann were getting 3,750,000 acres of land; by a further similar exercise it could be shown, by the device of estimating that each acre was sown with so much gold dust, that wealth beyond that of Ind was to be given the contractors, in return for a few miles of very indifferent railway. It was impossible, said one of the opposition leaders, to begin to estimate the value of this tremendous area; one single gulch might bring in millions of dollars. "Standing upon some peak in Yukon", one imaginative orator exclaimed, "the contractors, seeing the midnight sun gleaming on some glistening peak may cry out, in view of the millions this government had given them —" 'the Yukon is mine, the world is mine'."

Thus Mr. G. V. McInerney; but his brother Irishman, N. F. Davin, was not thus to be outstripped in vivid oratory.



The venture of government and railway company was compendiously described by him as an enterprise in piracy; he spoke of "a pirate-ship bearing down on this magnificent galleon—no galleon that ever went out of Cadiz could compare with it in wealth."

Against these bursts of oratory and flights of imagination, Mr. Sifton could oppose only a plain and unadorned story of his reasons for the measure before the House, and what he hoped to attain by it. The defects of the existing routes were set forth by him with particularity. It would not be possible properly to handle the prospectors who were crowding to the gold fields, to administer the territory or to control the trade in the interests of Canada, unless a reasonably efficient route controllable throughout by Canadian authorities was available. He contended that the scheme before the House provided the country with such a route. The period during which it could be used ran from the beginning of May until nearly the end of October. The distance from Vancouver to Dawson City could be covered in thirteen days.

It was true that the lower reaches of the Stikine River ran through territory held by the Americans; but the rights of transfer and approach were covered by treaty. The modification of the Anglo-Russian treaty of 1825 by the Washington treaty of 1870 still left Canada with the right and privilege of free navigation for purposes of commerce. If trouble arose over transshipment, there could be no curtailment of the right of Canadian ships to ply between Port Simpson and Telegraph Creek. There was no immediately available alternative Canadian route; if one were developed later it could be utilized as part of the Teslin Lake project. There was no protection of the route against competing railways if they kept to Canadian territory. Owing to the size and direction of the land locations which would be allotted to the railway, and the nature

of the gold deposits, not more than 35,000 acres out of the total land grant could possibly be gold bearing. The question was one of serious and great urgency. "I look for great things from the construction of this railway; I look for great things because of the fact that I think it will largely promote trade. I think it will conduce to the honour and dignity of Canada in making that country safe to us from a national standpoint."

Though Mr. Sifton had been a Minister for over a year his four hours speech on the Yukon railway bill, delivered to a crowded and deeply interested House, with packed galleries, revealed for the first time to his associates in Parliament and the country generally his power of lucid telling presentation. From his comparative youth, and the very limited part which he chose to play during his first session, the public had placed him as one of the minor members of the government—another case of a provincial Minister who found himself outclassed in swifter company at Ottawa. When, then, he rose in his place in parliament (February 15, 1898) and "took on" the veteran leader of the Conservative party, Sir Charles Tupper, speaking with the confidence, knowledge and authority of the man who was master of himself and of his subject, he made a deep and lasting impression. Old members of parliament, to find a parallel to the sensation which his performance created, went back to the great speech with which, in 1885, John S. D. Thompson, the new Minister of Justice, acquainted the House with his quality. From a striking contemporary account of Mr. Sifton's speech some quotations may perhaps fittingly be made here:<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Montreal *Witness*, March 5, 1899. From a further passage in this article the title of "Young Napoleon" which for some years was applied to Mr. Sifton, in earnest by his friends and satirically by his foes, was derived: "In the language of the west he is 'swift' and a 'hustler' and 'gets there' every time. In covering much ground, and moving quickly from place to place in a political campaign he emulates the tactics of the great Napoleon, who won so many battles



"Famous men in English political history have, it is well known, made dismal failures of their first appearance in the House of Commons. Others have made a good impression by their maiden speeches; but few have been furnished with the occasion for a great speech that was provided the other day in the Canadian House of Commons for Mr. Sifton, and even his opponents feel free to say that he made the most of it. In fact, his speech on the Yukon situation and the proposed contract with Messrs. Mackenzie and Mann, created a furore, and was a more pronounced success than any speech delivered in that chamber of late years, if Sir Wilfrid Laurier's speech on the Remedial Bill is excepted. . . . Mr. Sifton spoke for over four hours but never tired his audience. The most significant thing about his speech, however, is the fact that it made converts in the House, and spread consternation in the ranks of those who saw political capital ahead, and who had not counted on the silent young man from the west rising to his feet and carrying the whole House by storm. Old members of the House not accustomed to praise mere speech-making, men like John Charlton, M. C. Cameron, Dr. Landerkin and others, declared that Mr. Sifton had made a great speech. The House of Commons has an aversion to mere oratory, and declamation alone will never hold the attention of the members, as to be grandiloquent and witty is, in the experience of the House mostly to be associated with studied art, borrowed phrases and stolen sallies of wit. Mr. Sifton addressed himself to the subject under discussion, and though it was not unilluminated by a caustic sentence, a humorous remark, or a sharp retort here and there, he never left the subject and indulged in irrelevant talk. The House of Commons will always listen to that kind of a speech, and will always size up the man who is capable of making it."

The bill providing for the construction of the Yukon railway easily passed the House of Commons; but the Conservatives, in the belief that they had stirred up enough

and snatched victory from defeat so often by unexpected marches and an exhibition of sleepless energy and rapid movements. Such a man will have devoted followers, and those who have fought campaigns under him in Manitoba are as ready to swear by him as the soldiers of the empire were to swear by the hero of Austerlitz." The writer of this article was Arnott J. Magurn who was from 1898 to 1901 editor of the *Manitoba Free Press*.

public feeling to justify drastic action, killed it in the Senate, where they commanded a majority. With its defeat the whole project of an all-Canadian route into the Yukon from Telegraph Creek, to be reached at the outset by steamers up the Stikine River, but later possibly by a railway from a Canadian port, fell into nothingness. There was nothing for it but to make the best of the existing routes overland from bases located on a coast controlled by a government which, if not unfriendly, was at least kept sharply awake by reminders from the Pacific Coast as to the possibilities of putting difficulties in the way of Canadian trade.

Mr. Sifton turned again to considering the possibility of getting a Canadian port on the Lynn Canal. In October 1898 he wrote to Sir Wilfrid Laurier, then in attendance at Quebec at a meeting of the Joint High Commission, which had been appointed to deal with matters outstanding between Canada and the United States; urging him to try to make a practical deal with the Americans by which Canada would get a port on the Lynn Canal. "The acquisition of a port on the Lynn Canal," he wrote, "is the only method we have of getting back the trade of the Yukon district, which has been entirely lost owing to the failure of our railway policy of last session." He had no hopes, he explained, that Canada could achieve this by the process of submitting the Alaska Boundary dispute to a commission, but if Sir Wilfrid would tie up the question of a port on Lynn Canal with the matter of Canada relaxing her rights in the matter of pelagic sealing, it might be possible to make an arrangement. An extension of bonding rights would not meet the case. "We require the privilege of using the port for military purposes, and for the transport of arms and munitions of war. Besides, we wish to build up a town or city which will be a Canadian town or city, and a Canadian port where Canadian ships will have the preference." He wanted either Pyramid Harbour or Skagway.



The Canadian Commissioners made a vigorous effort to act upon this suggestion, and for a time with some prospect of success. The United States Commissioners rather favoured for a season the transfer of Pyramid Harbour. But once again the selfish trade interests of the Pacific Coast lifted up their voices in protest; and Washington listened and obeyed.

Thus the project fashioned by the ambitious minister was completely wrecked. But something was saved. The countless millions that those twin Monte Cristos, William Mackenzie and Donald Mann, were going to carry away from the Yukon, are still safely hidden in the wastes of the northland. The heavily charged auriferous soil of the gulch that Mr. Foster visioned, with riches far outstripping fabled Golconda, has not yet yielded its treasures to the pick of the prospector. The territory which would have been opened up by the construction of the route, with all the possibilities that go with such a development, remained and still remains a complete wilderness. In the last thirty years not a shovelful of pay dirt has been found in the whole area. The Yukon railway proposition was beyond doubt a gamble. There may have been something in the criticism of the opposition moralists that the Dominion Government should not have entered upon this gamble; but it is very clear in the backward view that at least the Dominion did not stand to lose in the speculation. It was the railway that took all the chances.

#### IV

The political system, as it exists in all British countries, arose from rivalries which were fought out on battlefields before they were transferred to the civil arena; and in its ethics and its philosophies it reveals its origin. Politics in its more primitive and vigorous manifestations is not a game nor a sport, but a form of civil war, with only lethal weapons barred. It is a conflict between rival principalities

for the control of a state, with all that this has implied in the different stages of civilization that a state passes through. Once it often carried with it proscription by law, and the loss of estates for the defeated; and though the growing feeling of humanity has, generation after generation, obliged parties progressively to abate or camouflage their preference for the spirit of war, it is still possible for a student of affairs in Great Britain to give this as his considered opinion of the spirit in which politics should be conducted: "Statecraft is not a sport, but an undertaking on which the gravest issues depend, and no man who takes this business seriously, no man who is really worthy of the national confidence, will ever give his enemy a fair field if he has the power to sow it with pitfalls."<sup>1</sup> There is also John Fiske's observation that "the statesman's business is to accomplish sundry concrete political purposes, and he measures statements primarily not by their truth but by their availableness as a means towards a practical end."

Or to put it plainly, politics is war in which nothing is foul if it furthers the end of attaining or holding power—for the purpose, as is always avowed, of putting into force policies which will save the state, or of preventing the application of politics destructive to the Commonwealth. The attitude of the Conservative opposition towards Mr. Sifton's developmental policies, whether with respect to immigration, colonization or the Klondike, was determined by a frank acceptance of this philosophy. There was a studied ignoring of the fact, which was so apparent to impartial observers inside and outside the country, that in relation to the size of the job and the success with which it was being done, the breakdowns and failures were insignificant and inconsequential. To them certain things were very clear: Sifton was a young, able, aggressive man; he was engaged in tasks in which success meant increased reputation for

<sup>1</sup>F. S. Oliver in *The Endless Adventure*.



himself, and the strengthening of the government which they were keen to turn out. Therefore, by the laws of war as applied to politics, he was to be attacked and assailed from every quarter; his achievements were to be misrepresented and disparaged; and every blot upon or weakness in the administration was to be stressed, magnified, exaggerated and given the worst conceivable interpretation. That there would be blots and weaknesses was inevitable. Enterprises of this magnitude, of which time and speed were inescapable elements, were bound to reveal here and there weaknesses, the result of oversight, of defective planning. Moreover, the system of political patronage then in full vigour, from which no minister could escape or desired to escape, could not be relied upon for the improvisation, at need, of executive and technical staffs equal to the demand that arose, on a scale and with a frequency to perplex even the resolute and confident young minister at Ottawa.

The Klondike episode saw an exemplification of all these tendencies. Taking into account the remote location of these gold fields; the difficulties attending their administration; the complexity of the problems which boiled up day by day for the puzzlement of the officials; the pressure upon the facilities of transportation, provisionment and government for a vast mob of nondescript fortune-hunters from all over the universe, the results in the Klondike must establish it as one of the most successful achievements of its kind in history. But the machinery was not elaborate nor elastic enough, nor the officials numerous and resourceful enough to keep things running as smoothly as they do in a highly organized and long-established community;<sup>1</sup> and on these defects and the complaints, real or trumped-up, which arose,

<sup>1</sup>I must say it passes my comprehension why men, ordinarily sensible and reasonable, should expect that under the circumstances that existed in Dawson for two or three months—circumstances never equalled in Canada before—everything would be done as in a department at Ottawa. Mr. Sifton in Parliament, 1899, *Hansard*, page 854.

the opposition based a campaign against Sifton and the government which was planned to destroy them. There was war between the parties looking forward to the trial of strength which was shortly to come; and these destructive tactics of attack were part of that offensive which is always the favoured strategy of the able commander.

About midsummer, 1898, there began to appear in the opposition newspapers, stories about the Yukon, in which charges against the officials of inefficiency, discourtesy, indifference, favouritism and graft abounded. Henceforth there was an unfailing stream of this kind of political literature. No one who came out of the Klondike disappointed or with a grievance failed to find sympathetic listeners. He might be notoriously a crook, a gambler, a thug with a criminal record of any or of no identifiable nationality; but if he wished to defame an official of the Canadian people struggling with a difficult task on a distant frontier, he did not lack people ready to listen to him, and to send out his story to the Canadian public with the assurance that it was true in every detail, proceeding as it did from a high-minded gentleman who had suffered wrong at the hands of corrupt and tyrannical Canadian civil servants.

The Yukon charges, about which the thunder and the shouting of the 1900 campaign arose, had to do almost entirely with the brief period during which Major J. M. Walsh held the Commissionership. Major Walsh in 1897 was in his fifty-fourth year. He had been for fifteen years engaged in commercial pursuits, but in an earlier day he had had a distinguished career as an officer of the Mounted Police. He it was who, with a few troopers, rode into Sitting Bull's camp, when that Indian warrior took refuge in Canada after the Custer massacre, and insisted upon him and his forces returning to the United States. He accepted the Commissionership with reluctance and for only a year as a public duty. He did not get across the passes until the end of



October 1897; was held up along the river for the winter months; and was in Dawson City only during the months of June and July, 1898. He paid for his temerity in undertaking the task of administering a frontier wilderness under impossible conditions by returning to private life with his name tarnished, as far as this could be accomplished by a storm of detraction and calumny. The writer has had the opportunity of reading all the private correspondence which passed between Major Walsh and Mr. Sifton during his seven months of administrative work; and they show Major Walsh throughout as well-intentioned, disinterested and anxious to do a good job for his country. He failed to get through to Dawson City before the setting in of winter, and spent the time between November and June first at Big Salmon River and afterwards at Lake Bennett. His letters show him awake to the problems of his task. He wrestles with the Minister about his Yukon policies—tells him his royalty of 20 per cent. is too high, and that the restriction of claims to 100 feet will never do. He is deeply concerned about the food supply for next season; and does not allow people to enter the country unless they have with them a thousand pounds of provisions. He is alarmed over the determined efforts made to get liquor into the country, and disgusted by the continued arrival of parties with licenses issued by the territorial government at Regina; his idea would be, he says to the Minister, to prohibit liquor altogether. What he hears from Dawson, which has sprung up overnight into a frontier mining town with 7,000 people, drawn from all parts of the world by the lure of gold, suggests to him the need of a vigorous wielding of the broom. "We hear nothing from there," he writes the Minister on January 2, "but questions born of avarice and immorality. Is the royalty to be imposed? Is the 100 feet claim to be enforced? Can I get a permit for a thousand gallons of whiskey? Are the gambling and dance houses to be closed?

Are the saloons to be licensed? This all needs purging and I would like to give it the dose required; but I am not going to remain long enough in the country to do it, and do not want to commence a work that my successor may disapprove of and would not complete."

In this last sentence we find the explanation of much of the trouble that developed in Dawson. Major Walsh did not reach there until May 21, and he left for the outside at the end of July. His letters to the Minister during this period were those of a rather easy-going man, who did not feel himself called upon to take any very decided action to cope with the situation which was developing by reason of an agitation which, resting chiefly upon organized hostility to the imposition of a royalty, took advantage of administrative defects and deficiencies—not to exclude the possibility of occasional irregularities—to work up public feeling.<sup>1</sup> He notes upon his arrival that the Gold Commissioner, though conscientious and hard-working, is not equal to his duties. There is a good deal of dissatisfaction with the Gold Commissioner's staff and with other officials. "I have been doing all I can since to change this feeling, and hope I have succeeded in some measure at least, and trust that by the time of my departure I shall have everything running smoothly between the population and the officials." He set about collecting the royalty, but it can be inferred from his letters that he still doubted the practicability of the plan; and he was induced, by plausible business representations, to give

<sup>1</sup>There was plenty of evidence that resentment against the imposition of a royalty tax, an unheard-of thing in mining districts, had a good deal to do with the agitation. A letter from an agent of London mining interests to his principals, dated June 14, 1898, was read in the House of Commons, March 30, 1899 by Sir Charles Hibbert Tupper. "We are trying," he wrote, "to get up an agitation against the barbarous amendments to the mining laws, including especially the 10 per cent. royalty and the alternate and abandoned claims returning to the government. . . It is absolutely essential to every success of every individual and company in the country that no time be lost in removing the clauses in the regulation relating to royalty and alternate claims becoming public property.



Alexander McDonald, the largest operator, an extension of time in his payment, of which much was made later. Royalty should not, he pointed out, be collected from the small mines which had made no profit. Shortly before he left for the outside he wrote: "Everything is going along quietly, with the exception of a little agitation against the royalty and the regulations generally by the holding of mass meetings. It is too old a 'gag' now to pay much attention to it." He also announced that he would bring out with him, as the royalty collection, "more gold and material to make wealth than Caesar brought to Rome on his return from Gaul."<sup>1</sup>

During the early months of 1898, as his correspondence shows, it was the problems of the Klondike that weighed most heavily on Mr. Sifton's mind. One of the charges most persistently thrown against him was that he used his position to give special favours in the Yukon to his personal and political friends. It can be said that some of his personal and political friends were quite willing to receive these favours. To one correspondent, A. E. Philp of Brandon, a very close friend, who had been pressing with considerable warmth the claims of a third party for special consideration, Mr. Sifton, in February 1898, wrote a peppery note: "I

<sup>1</sup>Major Walsh, upon retiring from the commissionership, returned to his home in Brockville. He died July 25th, 1905, in his 62nd year. Mr. Sifton, defending Major Walsh's administration, said at Brandon, October 13, 1900: "I thought Major Walsh was the best man for the position of administrator of the Yukon. The Conservative Press and the Liberal Press agreed that the best man was J. M. Walsh. I thought so then and I have not changed my mind. In a district over-run with all classes of people it was almost impossible to maintain order, and the very name of Walsh was as good as a thousand men in maintaining law and order, for everyone knew that if he had one man at his back he would do his duty. Major Walsh, a man who had nothing to gain; a man past the age when ambition actuates most men, a man in delicate health, left his family and faced the hardships and difficulties of the Yukon trail. He performed his duty to the best of his ability and I say he performed it well; and the fact that there was a little confusion in the first few months does not prove any incompetency or inability."—*Manitoba Free Press*, October 15, 1900.

have your letter enclosing one from Mr. B. I may just as well say without any circumlocution or hesitation that my friends cannot get any better treatment in regard to mining claims than anyone else. I did not grant the application when Mr. B. first wrote me because we had at that time no regulations adopted. When they were adopted your application came in on the same basis as the others. I do not want to get your friendship or Mr. B.'s on any false representation, therefore I feel it is my duty to say that I do not think my friendship will be of any advantage to you in mining matters."<sup>1</sup> He showed his concern and interest in the Klondike by administrative acts based upon a study of conditions.

Revised mining regulations based largely on representations which had been made by business organizations at the coast, were sent to the commissioner, and were subsequently reported as satisfactory by him. Walsh is advised by Sifton that there will be a tremendous rush of people, and that his suggestion that they be kept out is not practicable. It will only be possible to avert starvation the next winter by getting in supplies; he hopes he will be able to get them in by the projected railway. To Sir William Van Horne, on February 11th, the Minister writes that everything indicates that there will be a terrible state of affairs the coming season at Dyea and Skagway, but the conditions on the Canadian side would be all right. In March he advises Major Walsh to look out for a big rush in April. "The Canadian Pacific Railway train going west yesterday consisted of five sections, about half of them loaded with

<sup>1</sup>Mr. Sifton in quoting this letter in his Brandon meeting, October 13, 1900, added: "It is due to Mr. Philp to say that on receipt of my letter he wrote me that so far as he was concerned I had utterly misunderstood the letter: he did not expect anything more than the general public received." *Manitoba Free Press*, October 15, 1900. Mr. Philp's communication which drew the reply from Mr. Sifton was a covering letter for a protest from Mr. B. who complained about the lack of special consideration given him. "He (Sifton) is granting us", he complained, "no more than anyone else can get."



intending prospectors, so you will have all the people you can take care of."

In March Major Walsh writes that he desires to throw up the job and return forthwith, instead of at the end of his year as had been previously arranged.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Sifton writes back promptly, April 4th, that for the sake of his reputation he must carry out the programme as announced—he must establish headquarters, organize the government and the policing of the district, and put matters in shape before leaving. "It will be expected," he wrote, "that you will be on the ground until the arrival in the territory of the large number of those who are going in this season. I would be extremely sorry that your own reputation should suffer, as it undoubtedly would in public estimation, if you took the course which you suggest." To this letter there was a postscript: "I would rather lose \$20,000 than have you come back without going to Dawson." A week later another letter is despatched urging expedition in getting supplies to Dawson City to prevent distress in the latter part of the Spring.

Mr. Sifton chose as successor to Major Walsh, Mr. William Ogilvie, land surveyor and explorer, who had a long acquaintance with the territory.<sup>2</sup> In the interregnum between Major Walsh's departure and the arrival of Mr. Ogilvie, the storm broke. Stories of Klondike outrages and

<sup>1</sup>This was the result of Major Walsh's indignation upon learning that without consulting him a detachment of Mounted Police, under the command of Superintendent Steele, had been sent in from outside to take possession of the summit of the passes. Mr. Sifton had to explain that this was an act of emergency to forestall the Americans, who were planning to take possession of the reverse side of the slope, and extend the area of the disputed territory to the shores of Lake Lindeman. Major Walsh had not been consulted because he was thought to be at the time in Dawson.

<sup>2</sup>Wm. Ogilvie, born in Ottawa in 1846, spent more than twenty years, prior to his appointment to the Commissionership of the Yukon, in survey and exploratory work in North-western Canada. He retired from the Commissionership in 1901. Died in Winnipeg in 1912.

grievances began to pour out to the coast, and were there taken up and distributed by skilfully organized newspaper and political agencies. At once these stories began to appear everywhere in the Canadian press.<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Sifton's first reaction to this onslaught upon his administration was set out in a letter to William Templeman whose paper, the *Victoria Times*, had been publishing some of the complaints and suggesting the need of an immediate enquiry. To him under date of August 10th Mr. Sifton wrote:

"I want to know what the acts are and who have been guilty of them. The vague statements that someone has paid a Post Office official to give him his mail out of hours, seems to me to be a rather ridiculous foundation upon which to charge a large body of honourable men, who are working harder than any other body of officials in Canada, with wholesale corruption. I do not see why men who have gone up there and have faithfully endeavoured to do their duty, should be held up as being under a cloud and charged with corruption, when not even the most worthless loafer in Dawson City has yet come forward and made a statement charging anyone of them with corrupt conduct.

"I do not intend to ignore any charge that is made, but I do not intend to pre-suppose that men who were honourable men in their former positions have suddenly become scoundrels, and are to be put on their trial, until they are so charged and the specific acts of malfeasance of office are laid before me."

Mr. Sifton, who was at that time in the west, also wrote to Sir Wilfrid Laurier: "The Press attacks fail to specify a

<sup>1</sup>N. A. C. Treadgold, a correspondent of the London *Mining Journal*, writing from Dawson in 1898 after a survey of conditions, said: "A perusal of the above will show how plentiful a crop of grievances could be collected by a correspondent with an appetite for the garbage of a mining camp." He notes genuine shortcomings in the service and in the laws, but he makes allowances. "It is the rapid growth of the camp (from upwards of 5,000 souls in 1897 to upwards of 30,000 in 1898) that passes belief, and creates suddenly a volume of business hard for any officials to cope with, especially for such as have to learn their business to some extent as they go on." Quoted in *Hansard*, 1899, page 881.



single act of alleged malfeasance of office, and the ground I propose to take is to challenge anyone and everyone to bring forward their charges and they will be investigated.<sup>1</sup> They should be investigated by Mr. Ogilvie, the Commissioner of the government, upon the ground. I have already instructed him upon these points."

To Mr. Ogilvie, who by this time had proceeded to Dawson City, he wrote: "It will be of the utmost importance that every, if any, charge made against any official should be properly investigated by you." "You have," he said further, in a telegram to Ogilvie, "an absolutely free hand." This was followed by a letter in which Mr. Ogilvie was urged to improve the efficiency of the Gold Commissioner's office by adding to its staff; and by a rearrangement of the office along lines outlined. "I thought," he wrote, "that Major Walsh would have taken hold of the matter and put the office in proper shape, but he apparently was under the impression that he ought not to interfere with the Gold Commissioner. I hope you will understand that I expect you to interfere with them to any necessary extent to have the office put in proper shape at once." In the same letter he instructs Mr. Ogilvie to put all necessary facilities at the disposal of a member of parliament who is going to Dawson City to carry out an investigation into conditions.

Mr. Ogilvie reached Dawson City early in September. In a series of private letters to Mr. Sifton he reported on

<sup>1</sup>Sifton was indifferent to editorial attacks by newspapers; he regarded them as part of the game. What he feared and resented were coloured and distorted stories in the news columns. He set forth his views upon this point in a letter: "What actually injures the government is some carefully concocted piece of alleged news, which is prepared for the purpose of informing the readers of the paper that the government had done something offensive to the reader. It is not given as an attack upon the government, it is simply given as an item of news. The simple-minded farmer swallows it, and a great many people who are not farmers and who ought to know better. I am quite convinced that the damage is done by the news columns and not by the editorial columns." To E. H. Macklin, July 27, 1900.

the situation, as he found it. The reports which had first found publicity in the outside Press had to do with conditions in the Post Office and the Gold Commissioner's office—charges of inefficiency, inattention, favouritism and petty graft. Mr. Ogilvie wrote to Mr. Sifton that these charges were largely based upon conditions of inadequate accommodation, which he intended to remedy. He rather minimized these complaints as of no great importance; but wrote that from the time of his arrival, people claiming to have grievances, kept waylaying him to talk scandal to him about the alleged wrongdoings of a number of officials, all of whom were without exception "outside" at the time on leave of absence. He set out some of these stories—as told to him—every one of which, it may be said, proved to be without any real foundation when, later, a formal investigation was held by Mr. Ogilvie under a special commission issued to him by the government.

After receiving these, Mr. Sifton wrote to Mr. Ogilvie expressing his surprise at his report that few complaints had been made to him against the administration of the Post Office or the Gold Commissioner's office, about which the charges in the newspapers had centred, but that instead the attack had been shifted to officials who were absent at the time on leave.

"It seems to me," he wrote, "to be most remarkable, when the matter comes to be investigated, that nothing seems to be said against the Gold Commissioner's office or the Post Office, but an attempt is made to call attention to a lot of men who are away."

If charges were made against absent officials they would have to return to face them. He added:

"I sent them in there to transact their business properly. They have come out and asserted to me that they did so; that they are anxious and willing to meet any charges that may be made against them. In justice to them I intend that they shall have the opportunity, and in justice to myself and



to the government I am going to insist that they do it: that is to say, I am going to see that every man who has been on the staff and has come out, and against whom charges have been made by you, will go back to Dawson City and meet the charges before you. . . While the government does not intend to brand any official as being dishonest and unworthy of confidence without evidence being given to support such a charge, it is necessary for you to bear in mind that it is the desire of the government that the investigation should be altogether thorough, and that no official should be permitted to shield himself behind any kind of a subterfuge or excuse. Parliament when it meets is entitled to a clear and specific statement, which will satisfy every reasonable man that the facts have been thoroughly brought out and investigated."

These somewhat extensive quotations from Mr. Sifton's correspondence have been made because they so clearly reveal the alarm and distress which he felt at these developments in the Klondike. He did not propose to sacrifice his officials, some of whom were close friends, in the face of popular clamour; but he had no intention of protecting them if charges made against them were sustained.

There is also an understanding by him, evident in the letters that, apart from all questions of good or evil intentions on the part of the officials, the organization put together in such a hurry had not been fully equal to the demands made upon it. He admits that on the known facts the Gold Commissioner's office has been guilty of "frightful bungling," and that there is a very general belief that some of the clerks are "crooked". There must therefore be extensive changes; and these are made from the Gold Commissionership down. He recognizes that the difficulties arising from a conflict over claims along Dominion Creek have not been handled in a satisfactory manner, though he is careful to say that in his observations to this effect there is no reflection upon the motives or intentions of the officials;

he seeks full information so that further consideration may be given to these matters.

In these letters he foreshadowed the position which he took in the next session of parliament, when the opposition made the Yukon "irregularities" the spear-head of their attack upon the government. To the broadsides of Sir Charles Hibbert Tupper, in which were included every complaint and insinuation that had been put out, he held inflexibly to one position. To the complaints and charges thus recapitulated he made detailed answers; but he declined to grant the demanded committee of investigation on the strength of general charges based upon hearsay evidence. He would consent to no "fishing for evidence expedition" under conditions which put his officials under an imputation of guilt. Let specific charges be made with the member making them accepting full personal responsibility, and there would be an enquiry; not otherwise. And he threw out a challenge to which, as events proved, there was a sequel: he said that if any member of the opposition would make outside of the House a charge of personal corruption in connection with Klondike matters, he would be given an opportunity, in court, of proving his case.

The Yukon charges were thus fiercely debated in the session of 1899; in the following session there was further discussion, but in a more restrained mood. By that time Mr. Ogilvie had held his enquiry and the evidence was available; the subject of Yukon irregularities did not, in consequence, seem to be as promising as in the previous session, when the air was full of hearsay scandal.

When Mr. Ogilvie opened his enquiry the organizations of "miners" and individuals, who had been active in spreading stories, refused to prefer charges or give evidence, upon the pretext that the enquiry dealt only with irregularities alleged to have taken place prior to August 25th, 1898,



though this period covered all the widely-circulated stories. But the commissioner went ahead and, on his own account, checked up a number of reports that had been made to him when he arrived. Under enquiry the apparently circumstantiated details, as originally retailed to the Commissioner, underwent a transformation. There was, to illustrate, the story of the woman who could not get her perfectly good claim recognized until she assigned a half-interest to another woman, who was acting on behalf of a mining inspector. Upon investigation it turned out to be a clear case of attempted bribery in support of a fraudulent claim.

As Mr. Ogilvie's private reports to the Minister continued he began to locate and identify the sources of the "stories" that were still circulating. One "association" very active in the manufacturing of memorials, resolutions and charges, consists, he tells the Minister, of eight men, most of them undesirables. Police reports on the characters of some of the agitators are attached. One of the most active is an Australian ex-convict, with a long record as agitator and law-breaker. Most of them are adventurers. Mr. Ogilvie's report, upon the conclusion of his enquiry, reduces the charges to trivial proportions.

Thus in the parliamentary session of 1900 the attacks upon the administration of the Yukon were more discreet than in the previous year. But in the election of 1900 these accusations, in all their virulence, reappeared as part of the campaign against Mr. Sifton, with results that are a matter of history.

## V

Subsequent developments in the Yukon may here be conveniently noted. As a matter of Dominion interest, the Klondike rapidly receded in importance as the productive capacity of the camp began to shrink. In 1898 gold production reached \$10,000,000; next year it rose to \$16,000,000; 1900 was the year of maximum production,

\$22,275,000; in 1901 it had fallen to \$17,000,000; and thereafter the decline was steady: 1902, \$11,962,690; 1903, \$10,625,422; 1904, \$9,413,074; in 1905, \$7,162,438; and so on in descending figures. There was a corresponding shrinkage in the population of the area, and the volume of ordinary business done. Whereas in 1898, in the height of the excitement, there were 30,000 people in Dawson alone, the population of the whole Yukon in 1901 was only 27,000, of which less than one-fourth were in Dawson. What had been foreseen from the outset by Mr. Sifton—the digging out of the placer beds, and the dispersion to the four corners of the earth of the motley crowd that had poured into the country—was taking place.

As production diminished there were changes in the royalty: the rate dropped to 5 per cent.; and then to  $2\frac{1}{2}$ . Then an export tax replaced the royalty. The people of Dawson were very reluctant to accept the situation; and in the hope that, if hydraulic mining on a large scale could be introduced the decline would be stayed, an agitation arose directed towards inducing the Dominion government to carry out large and costly plans of water development. This the government would not do; but in 1901, upon the recommendation of Mr. Sifton, a syndicate headed by N. A. C. Treadgold, of London, was given a concession to take water from the river and make it available for the purpose of hydraulic mining. At once the Treadgold concession became a bone of contention in the Yukon; and the Conservative opposition at Ottawa naturally took the side of those who objected to the granting of the concessions. A campaign, not unlike that which destroyed the Teslin railway scheme, was carried on against the concession. It was represented as a monopoly carrying with it enormous profits. The government's defence was that the water would be made available to all miners under conditions and rates fixed by the government; and that the claims given to the



syndicate for development were lapsed claims on high bench-lands which could not be developed without water.

To investigate the charges made in respect to this concession, a royal commission headed by Mr. Justice Britton, was appointed; but while it was taking evidence the syndicate abandoned the enterprise and withdrew from the field. Nevertheless the commission made a report. It found that a proper water-supply was essential to the future of the Yukon; that such a supply would probably have been available under the concession; and that most of the objections to the concession were based upon misapprehensions. With the abandonment of the concession and the continued refusal of the government to enter upon a large water scheme, all prospect of hydraulic mining over a large area disappeared. Hydraulic and power mining by individual companies on a relatively small scale gradually replaced placer mining, and mining in the Klondike became an ordinary hum-drum business. The Klondike that had stirred the emotions and cupidities of the people, and had provided Canadian politics with fighting issues, passed completely out of the picture.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### DOMINION MINISTER—THE 1900 ELECTION

He had a polar quality which attracted love and hatred with a force that meaner natures are exempt from. His capacity for uniting his enemies was inferior only to his gift for inspiring devotion in his friends. He was combative; loved the giving of blows and cared little about receiving them. His youth made it unforgivable that he should be so outspoken.—*F. S. Oliver: Alexander Hamilton.*

**D**URING the first term of the Laurier government Mr. Sifton, though taking his full part in all the concerted actions of the government, kept his interest pretty much centred upon the particular policies for which he was specially responsible and policies akin to them. All these policies had one thing in common—they dealt with matters of business. Mr. Sifton plainly regarded it as very much the duty of the government to develop trade, to build up cities, to supply facilities. To succeed in these respects, to see railway mileage grow, trade expand, bank clearings rise, was, in his opinion, good politics as well as good business. This was the key to all his policies, great and small. It explained, for instance, his determination to exact a royalty of ten per cent. on gold mined in the Yukon; the government, he held, was entitled to get something out of these fields, and this was the only way it could be got.

In his public speeches of this period, delivered at various points in Ontario, in Montreal and in many western centres, and also in his correspondence, he shows his concentration upon the business aspects of the government's policies. The deepening of the St. Lawrence canals, one of the first public works planned by the new government, he regarded as a



most desirable addition to the transportation facilities of the country. Mr. Laurier had hardly taken office before, in the form of an interview in an American newspaper, he expressed the hope that by joint action by the United States and Canada the river might speedily be deepened to a uniform depth of twenty feet—an opinion which shows how far in advance of his generation he was in some respects. This not being practicable the Laurier government decided to enlarge all these canals to a uniform depth of fourteen feet. When thirty years later Montreal business rallied against a proposal to deepen the canals to twenty-seven feet, Sir Clifford was wont to recall an encounter which took place in 1897 between a sub-committee of the government of which he was a member, and a delegation of Montreal business men. These business men expounded to the government with great earnestness their theory that Montreal would simply be ruined if the canals were deepened. Laurier listened to them, puzzled and incredulous; but as the drift of their appeal came home he could not refrain from laughter at the absurdity of their fears. The programme was carried out, and by 1900 the canals were deepened to fourteen feet—at which depth they have since remained.

Perhaps the most striking feature of his correspondence at this time is the revelation of the apprehension, which grew upon him, that the pressure and influence of United States business was a menace to Canadian growth and prosperity. Here can be seen the beginnings of the conviction that later made him the inveterate opponent of reciprocity. Shortly after taking office he wrote to a British Columbia lawyer, who wanted to know if the government would permit a railway to be built that would carry British Columbia ores to the Heinze Smelter south of the line, that the proposition was “extremely objectionable from a Canadian standpoint”, adding: “We suffer from one end of Canada to the other

from the fact that our trade is drawn off through American channels, and the bulk of the business goes to the people on the other side of the line instead of to our own people; and while I do not favour anything in the way of retaliatory legislation, I do favour a continued and persistent effort to stop these leaks and get the benefit of our own natural resources."

His keenness to keep railway business for Canadians was further shown in connection with the building of the Crowsnest Pass railway. He protested to T. G. Shaughnessy, President of the Canadian Pacific Railway, against the letting of a construction contract to an American contracting firm contrary to the understanding. If the understanding was not to be lived up to "we are likely to have a collision." W. F. McCreary, Immigration Commissioner of Winnipeg, got peremptory instructions to invoke the provision of the alien labour act to prevent United States working outfits coming in to take sub-contracts in the building of the road; and the Canadian Pacific Railway was called upon to gather up a carload of Italians who had been taken to Lethbridge and return them to New York. Canada for the Canadians!

But it was when the Joint High Commission met, first in Quebec in August 1898, and afterwards in Washington, to arrange a treaty adjusting all the outstanding differences between Canada and the United States, that he showed the depth and range of his apprehensions. He expressed his fears and hopes in a series of letters to Sir Wilfrid Laurier and other commissioners. On August 24th, in a letter, dealing with other matters, written from Rat Portage to Sir Louis Davies, then in attendance at the conference, there is this observation: "From all that I can gather the people generally will not feel badly if a reciprocity arrangement does not materialize." On October 3rd, as already noted, he urged Sir Wilfrid to settle the Alaskan boundary diffi-



culty by a business deal, which would give Canada a port on the Lynn Canal. To refer the matter to a commission, in his opinion, would mean that the existing conditions would be confirmed. In a long letter to Sir Wilfrid Laurier, written November 29th, he set forth his views compendiously. He was definitely against a free exchange of flour if a reciprocity treaty were made. (In a later letter he added coal and wheat to flour). He wanted the bonding arrangements left as they were, and was against a special treaty dealing with bonding to be administered by an international tribunal. On this point he said:

"I do not believe that an international tribunal can be constituted which will be satisfactory, and I regard with very great fear the constitution of such a body where the United States would constantly appear, for the purpose of driving us into a corner, and compelling concessions on an unfair and strained construction of the Treaty. Moreover, such a treaty would give the United States to some extent territorial rights in Canada, with the privilege of asserting the right of the stronger power to insist upon what they would claim to be the fair interpretation of the treaty. It would be the thin edge of the wedge, which would ultimately result in seriously injuring us."

He was "bitterly hostile," he went on to say, to a suggestion that United States mining prospectors, coming into Canada, should be allowed to bring in outfits up to \$250 free of duty. To permit such an arrangement would be equivalent to transferring the trade of the Klondike to Seattle. The people would a thousand times rather that he (Laurier) should come back without a treaty than that he should bring back a treaty that could be attacked. That in his view any treaty that could be made would be that kind of a treaty, he made quite plain:

"In fact, looking over all the suggestions which have been made in connection with this treaty very carefully and very deliberately, as far as I can remember every suggestion

which has come has seemed to be that Canada should give away something that was of value to her, no intimation being thrown out that we were to get anything worth while in return for it. As you know, I am disposed to make the best of things and stand by the judgment of a majority of my colleagues, but if my judgment is worth anything to you I feel that I ought to say that it will be a frightful mistake for us to make any concessions to the United States in the proposed treaty, for which we do not get the most ample returns. I am further convinced that the Americans will not make the treaty unless it is altogether jug-handled in their favour."

The conference broke down in February, 1899, never to be resumed, because an agreement could not be reached with respect to the adjustment of the Alaskan boundary, the Canadians insisting that it be referred to an arbitration commission with an impartial chairman, while the Americans stood out for a judicial commission of six divided equally between the two disputants. The Americans were willing to make a treaty covering the other questions, but the Canadians made the test of their good intentions their willingness to leave the boundary dispute to arbitration; and came home in somewhat militant mood. "No more pilgrimages to Washington" was, it was understood, to be henceforth the government policy. Some of the Cabinet Ministers were deeply disappointed, but not Mr. Sifton. The situation suited him perfectly. He felt that a danger had been escaped; and he hoped that the last had been heard of reciprocity.

It was the intention of the government to dissolve parliament in the late fall of 1899, in keeping with the curious superstition that once a government gets properly into its stride it must be on the look-out for a chance to put the opposition at a disadvantage by a surprise dissolution; but the outbreak of the South African war and the resulting popular excitement forced a postponement for a year. This made the session of 1900 patently a pre-war election one;



but despite the importance of being in the House under these conditions, Mr. Sifton was forced to absent himself for the greater part of the session. His deafness, the physical disability which so badly handicapped him in his whole political career, was growing upon him apace, and in March he had to turn over his department and the defence of his policies to his colleagues and depart for Vienna to consult a specialist. He had to leave unfinished the drafting of the grain act, based upon the report of a commission which had been appointed, upon his recommendation, to report upon what provision should be made to protect the rights of the farmers, in shipping their grain either through line elevators or through loading warehouses. The act which was placed upon the Statute Book in Mr. Sifton's absence became the charter of the Western graingrowers' rights, and in its main provisions still survives, but in one or two of its minor provisions it failed to give entire satisfaction.<sup>1</sup> In the subsequent general election Sifton was denounced in the West as responsible for these defects, on account of his absence from parliament, which was represented as part of a plot against the farmers' rights. Such was the malignity of politics in those days!

Mr. Sifton returned in July to find preparations for the election under way. The west was given into his charge, but before departing for his particular field he took a look over the Ontario field, and there he saw an act of folly by the Liberal organization which moved him to make a protest to Sir Wilfrid. Frontenac had been represented since

<sup>1</sup>This act provided that the owners of all elevators and warehouses must take out licenses, submit to supervision by the warehouse commissioner, and give bonds for due performance of duties entrusted to them. Elevators were obliged to accept all grain offered for sale, storage or shipment, at the discretion of the owner. Railways were obliged to build loading platforms for farmers upon petition and to supply cars. The act proved successful in operation, except in the important matter of car distribution. In 1902 it was amended to protect the rights of farmer shippers to their due proportion of cars.

1896 by Mr. D. D. Rogers, a Patron member who had given the government, in Sifton's words, "a good general support."<sup>1</sup> Despite this fact the Liberals in the constituency had nominated a Liberal candidate to contest the field against Rogers and the Conservative. This would mean, Mr. Sifton pointed out, that the constituency would be lost. "It entitled the opposition and all the Independents in Canada to brand the Liberal organization with the basest ingratitude. The fact that Rogers has been thrown over will put a weapon in the hands of every Independent kicker in Canada, and give them an excuse and a plausible reason for not supporting the government. If anyone is allowed to bungle things in this way enough constituencies to defeat the government may be lost before the campaign starts." The letter is of some importance, as showing that the charge made at this time against Sifton that he would not tolerate independence in public life and favoured only party hacks in Parliament was not true.

## II

By the time the Laurier government found it necessary to go to the people in November 1900, Mr. Sifton's position in the party and in the government was well defined. He was recognized as one of the inner group which develops naturally in every government—the men of courage and initiative who take the lead in council in facing difficulties and shaping policies. He was known to share in exceptional degree the favour and regard of Sir Wilfrid Laurier. He was the undoubted, accepted leader of the party in Western Canada. For this position a price, however, had been paid.

<sup>1</sup>The "Patrons of Industry" was an agrarian party which commanded considerable support in Ontario in the 'nineties. Though its strength was chiefly shown in the provincial elections it sent about half-a-dozen members to the Dominion parliament in the election of 1896. These members gave the Laurier government an "independent support."



He had insisted upon what he regarded as a reasonable measure of party discipline, and this had been attained, in considerable degree, after a good deal of heartburning and internal strife. It took some time for the news to get around that the young man who had been chosen to represent the West had views of his own, and could not be bluffed, intimidated or stampeded. He had hardly taken office when a faction fight broke out in Prince Albert, where a by-election had just been held; and the information was brought to him that a group of dissatisfied Liberals intended to protest the election and unseat the successful member. If, however, the leader of the insurgents was promised a senatorship the difficulty would be adjusted. Mr. Sifton refused point blank. "I won't make any promise to anybody: I would rather lose the constituency. One thing the people of a constituency of that kind have to understand is that they cannot kick up a row and take the government by the throat, and get themselves bought off."

A little later the "saw-off," which in those times was an inevitable aftermath to every general election campaign, took place; that is to say, election protests against the Conservative members were by arrangement withdrawn upon condition that all threatened Liberal members should be left in undisturbed possession of their seat. The pressure for these arrangements came, of course, from the elected members, who in most cases were quite prepared to call quits after the fight was over; but the actual arrangement had to be made by the leaders, since they alone had enough influence to get the consent of the local associations to these withdrawals. Mr. Sifton's correspondence shows that after the first session of the new parliament the leaders got together at Ottawa and agreed that all the pending election petitions on both sides should be dropped. Sifton was charged with seeing that the arrangements west of Lake

Superior were carried out; Hugh John Macdonald acted for the Conservatives.

A snag was encountered in West Assiniboia, where the local Liberals insisted upon proceeding with their protest against Nicholas Flood Davin. He had won the election by the casting vote of the returning officer; and the Liberals had protested the seat, knowing that they could easily defeat him in a by-election. Feeling in this constituency was very bitter and the local Liberals could not see why they should forego their long-sought vengeance upon Mr. Davin in order that elsewhere some Liberal might be saved from an election contest. Mr. Sifton probably would have failed if Walter Scott, destined to defeat Davin at the next election, had not brought his influence to bear. Writing to thank Scott for his services Mr. Sifton said:

"It may seem peculiar politics to take so much trouble to secure a man like Davin in his seat, but the effort is not at all wasted when the honour of the government is at stake, and when the confining of the party to some kind of discipline is at stake. There are occasions when the members of the government have to take great responsibility, and have to depend upon their friends to see them through, otherwise a party would go to pieces and the tail would be wagging the dog, with the result that the dog would grow mad and probably die of hydrophobia."

A leader with these ideas as to the necessity of a certain amount of directed team-play was bound to find them not wholly acceptable to the untterrified democracy of the west; and it was equally inevitable that his immediate associates, long accustomed to the freedom of opinion and of utterance that is the consolation of being in opposition, would be reluctant to admit any obligation to consider any other audience than their own constituents. After a question had been discussed and considered, in many cases in caucus, and a policy for the Dominion decided upon—a policy often



embodying a compromise not wholly acceptable to the west, and not pleasing to himself—Mr. Sifton did not think it was sportsmanlike on the part of his political associates to refuse to bear their share of the unpopularity induced by these compromises. There were then—as there have been ever since—electors who could not see any necessity for compromise on policies favoured by the west; and who were inclined to regard concessions of any kind as betrayals. Liberal members of the House and prominent members of the party outside, who maintained their reputation for one hundred per cent. doctrinal purity by deploring the surrender of the government and lamenting the complaisance of Mr. Sifton, found the Minister of the Interior disinclined to be put in the position of scapegoat for their protection.

Many of the western members were slow to learn that in Dominion politics there had to be give and take. In a letter, Sifton says that the western representation is acquiring a reputation for lacking commonsense and ballast; his life was being made miserable by them. "It seems to me," he observed, in a letter to one of the western members, "that our people should act like men instead of children, and recognize the tremendous task of the government. The members of the House should rise above such petty nonsense as seems to be occupying the attention of some of them, and stand by their leaders and defend the government and their policy. Any other course means destruction of the leaders and also destruction of the followers. A political party must either hang together or hang separately."

As time went on the Minister and the members got on better working terms; and there was no permanent breach, except in the case of R. L. Richardson, M.P. for Lisgar. "Mr. Richardson decided, at an early date in his parliamentary career," Mr. Sifton wrote in 1900, "to try and make himself popular at the expense of the government, and he has misrepresented my actions and those of the government

from the very start." Mr. Richardson took a line which—whether it was based on deep conviction as his supporters said, or on a calculation that this was a short road to popularity—was effective in spreading dissension among the Liberals. He let it be known that amidst the distractions, allurements and temptations of Ottawa he alone adhered to the western faith in all its primitive purity; among the faithless, faithful only he. A quarrel, so bitter and so deep as this between a Cabinet Minister and a member who was also in control of a daily newspaper, could not but be detrimental to the party in a province like Manitoba, where it could count upon no margin of advantage.

The defeat of the Government, of which Thomas Greenway was the head, in December 1899, was an indication that the party's position was weakened as the result of these troubles. Many causes contributed to that defeat; but the chief reason, as given by Sifton, who was in Manitoba when the election took place, was that the party had lost through over-confidence, lack of exertion and defective organization.<sup>1</sup> But a substantial contributing cause was without doubt the hostility of Mr. Richardson and his friends to the government; and this hostility, still more envenomed, could be counted upon to be a factor in the Dominion elections. In 1897, after the by-elections, the Liberal government held five out of the seven Dominion seats in Manitoba; in 1900, upon the eve of the Dominion contest this number had been reduced to three by the defection of Mr. Richardson and the election of A. W. Puttee, Labour, in Winnipeg, in a by-election following the death of R. W. Jameson, the Liberal member. This was part of the price that had to be paid if the party was to be put in order for the battle that was

<sup>1</sup>To a correspondent who, after the provincial election sought to make him responsible for something which the Greenway government had done, he entered a humorous disclaimer: "I think I may without any egotism claim that there is enough internal evidence to indicate that I have not been directing the affairs of the local government during the past two years."



coming. Things being as they were the split was inevitable. With the insurgents ranked under their own banners the Liberals of Manitoba went into the battle a harmonious, thoroughly organized host, with Sifton at their head. In Manitoba, as was evident to all, the battle would be hard and the issue doubtful; but further west it was equally apparent that the Sifton policies, already successfully operating, left the result in no doubt.

### III

The election of 1900 was full of fury signifying nothing in particular. The Conservative leader, that stout old warrior Sir Charles Tupper, then approaching his eightieth year, put on the kind of a campaign which in his experience had brought results. There was wholesale vigorous denunciation; there were loud and assured trumpeting of victory. But the times were not propitious for such a campaign. In 1900 the people were content; they did not in the mass desire any change. With the breaking-out of the South African war the opposition hoped that an issue had arisen which could be put to good use. A good deal was made in Ontario of the government's hesitation about sending contingents, and more about its stinginess in not meeting the whole cost of Canada's participation in the war: but the gains there made by the opposition were largely offset by a more determined rallying of Quebec to Laurier's standard.

The attempt to stir up feeling in Quebec against the government for prostrating itself before the imperialistic Mr. Chamberlain failed; the time was not yet come when antipathetic extremes in Ontario and Quebec could be combined in a common hostility to Laurier.

The government's most effective argument was the country's prosperity. "The indications are generally," Mr. Sifton said, in a letter to Isaac Campbell some months before the election, "that we are going to have prosperity for a few

years to come, which whether it ought to or not will no doubt help the party in power." When the election came on the government claimed credit for the prosperity upon better grounds than are usually available in a case of this kind. They could say that under the remodelled tariff, trade had grown more in the four years of the Laurier regime than in the eighteen years of Conservative rule; that under the encouragement, as claimed, of the preferential feature of the tariff, exports from Canada to Great Britain had increased fifty per cent., while the exports to the United States had remained almost stationary; that the revenue was buoyant, substantial surpluses (\$4,837,749 in 1898-1899) replacing deficits; that the country had been able to carry through a large number of needed public works at a very small increase in the public debt.

This was a good story in itself; and it lost nothing in the telling of it by enthusiastic campaigners. The impetus to business resulting from the increased immigration, due to the Sifton policies, was naturally strongly emphasized. It was estimated that there were 70,000 farmers in the prairie west, a considerable percentage of whom had come in the preceding four years, 10,000 in 1899 alone; the 30,000 farmers in Manitoba alone had in the preceding year sold products to the value of 23 million dollars. "It is impossible," the Liberal campaign handbook said, "to value the great wealth to Canada of the large number of people who have come to Canada since the Liberals came into power from Great Britain, Europe and the United States." Their value, it was pointed out, was to be found in the purchasing power which the soil, under the instrumentality of these immigrants, would produce—power which would be applied in the purchase of building materials, implements, furniture and other commodities. If the policies were to be continued, which, it was urged, could only be assured by returning the government, there would be a steady increase in immigra-



tion, an increase in agricultural production and an increase in trade. Manufacturers, merchants and workingmen in all parts of Canada," said the campaign document, "will receive the advantage which is certain to show a steady increase, year by year, not only from the incoming settlers but from an increase in the production of those who settled in the country."

Thus the Sifton policies were everywhere vote-getters; "Sifton" was a name to conjure with. Everywhere except in Manitoba, where, if politics were not rooted in irrationality, the Liberals, by virtue of the prestige and attainments of their minister, would have held an impregnable position. The province was reviving, the city of Winnipeg was growing, settlers were coming in, land prices were rising—the long period of stagnation was obviously passing; and there was justice in the claim that the Sifton policies were the chief agency in working the transformation. To his political enemies, however, his success was an offence. To disgruntled, time-serving Liberals, Sifton was the man who had not given them jobs. And, in addition, there were considerable numbers of honest Liberals of radical and extreme views who were disappointed in the new Minister. He had not brought in free trade, he had not made war on the Canadian Pacific Railway, he had not done this, he had not achieved that; and in the light of these "failures" his actual achievements were less than the dust, in their eyes. The Conservatives were not, in fact, confident of the general result; but they were absolutely certain of the outcome in Manitoba. The party was to recapture the province, and Sifton was to be beaten and driven into private life. In the pursuit of Sifton there was a good deal of personal feeling. The Conservatives, now triumphant in the province, had not forgotten the humiliations of 1892 and 1896. The dominant influence in the Conservative party at this time was that of the Tupper, father and son; and in parliament

there had been encounters between Sifton and both of them in which harsh words had been bandied back and forth. Sir Charles Hibbert Tupper, now living in Vancouver, had constituted himself special flagellator of Sifton for the Yukon "irregularities"; and there was bitter feeling between the two young men.

The Conservatives laid their plans in Manitoba with care. They came to an arrangement with R. L. Richardson, by which they agreed to support him in Lisgar in return for the friendship of his supporters elsewhere. And to make it doubly certain that Mr. Sifton would have no chance in Brandon, they induced Hugh John Macdonald to resign from the premiership of Manitoba and take the field against him. Hugh John had been victorious in all his electoral battles, and now he was to round out his record by taking Sifton's scalp. There is reason to believe that Mr. Macdonald had no wish at this time to re-enter Dominion public life. He was premier of Manitoba, and his desire was to implement his engagement to the people of Manitoba, particularly with respect to enforcing the prohibition law which he had put on the Statute book during his one term as premier, and which was then under attack in the courts. But loyalty to his friends and his party was Hugh John's outstanding characteristic; he felt that Sir John Macdonald's son could refuse no duty laid upon him by his party. At the call of his father's colleague, Sir Charles Tupper, and under pressure from some of his immediate political associates, whose advice was not wholly disinterested, he gave up the Premiership, which he had won on his own merits and which he would have adorned, and took the high road to political oblivion by entering the lists against Clifford Sifton in Brandon.

The emergency was a test both of Sifton's intelligence and courage, and he came through it with high marks. He saved himself by realizing that he was in great danger, and



throwing himself into the fight with all the power he could command. If he had allowed even the slightest margin for a supposed advantage arising from his position of Cabinet Minister it would have been fatal to him. In his first hurried survey of Brandon in the month of August he was delighted to find his followers in a condition bordering on blue funk. "The opposition," he wrote to a friend, "are openly declaring that we will not be able to carry Brandon in this election, and our friends are manifesting an amount of uncertainty which in my judgment is a very healthy sign, over-confidence being about the worst fault possible in an election." He called on his friends to gird on their armour for the battle. To a friend in California he wrote: "Please leave the orange groves and flower gardens of California and make your way to the icy north as soon as possible. When you get this please telegraph your intentions after you have got over the shock." He writes to Isaac Campbell to warn him that he will be expected to take the stump. "I am sending you one of our campaign books in case you may want to brush up your memory on the many great and wonderful achievements of this government. Much less than what is in this book will suffice a man of your genius to make a very striking speech." Thus did he summon the clans.

In September at the nominating convention he made a full dress speech presenting the case for the government, and defending his course on the tariff, the Crowsnest Pass railway, the elevator bill and other matters which were grounds of attack. "I think," he said, in formally accepting nomination, "we shall have one of the hardest contests fought in the Dominion; but I am going in it to win, and I hope with the efforts of my friends who stand by me to have the same results as in the five or six contests which have gone before."

Every conceivable line of attack upon Sifton was exploited; two issues that were most skilfully turned against him were prohibition and the tariff on agricultural imple-

ments. The constituency was over-run by speakers and canvassers, claiming to speak for temperance organizations, who denounced Sifton as a traitor to the temperance cause because the Dominion plebiscite of 1897 had not been followed by Dominion prohibition; his recreancy was contrasted with Mr. Macdonald's fulfilment of his election pledge by the passage of a prohibition measure for Manitoba. Prohibitionists, it was declared, had no option but to vote for Mr. Macdonald.

Mr. Sifton had to explain that in view of the heavily adverse vote of Quebec in the Dominion plebiscite, a Dominion-wide prohibition measure was not practicable on two counts: it could not be got through parliament in the face of the opposition of the Quebec members, and if it did get through it would be impossible to enforce it in the face of Quebec hostility. What could be done was the passage by the Dominion parliament of a prohibition measure, which could be invoked to so supplement a provincial enactment as to make prohibition within the province absolute; he was in favour of such a law and would seek to get it enacted. (Such a law was finally enacted some eighteen years later by the war government of Sir Robert Borden). Other temperance leaders rushed into Brandon constituency to defend Sifton; and the curious sight was witnessed of two campaigns being waged simultaneously in the constituency: one by the politicians, the other ostensibly apart from and beyond politics, by temperance orators.

On the question of free agricultural implements Sifton held to his position that the tariff of ten per cent. was not unreasonable; and in his nomination speech he defended it. There was a good deal of feeling on this point in the constituency, and when Hugh John Macdonald declared that he was in favour of taking the duty completely off these implements, Sifton found himself in a dangerously exposed position. "Free agricultural implements," he wrote to an east-



ern friend, "is now part of the Tory campaign here and is going to hurt us like the devil." To the same correspondent, who sought to cheer him up by telling him that Hugh John Macdonald's speaking tour in Ontario had been a failure and that he would not be a strong candidate, Mr. Sifton wrote a reply in which he did not gloss over the realities. Hugh John might be a failure, he said; "nevertheless he beat Isaac Campbell and Joe Martin, and wound up by beating Greenway, and he will beat me unless our people do all they know how." But after giving discouraging particulars of the campaign he added: "You are aware however that I am not licked until the votes are polled."

It is not probable that in any case Mr. Sifton would have been beaten, but he was saved from this possibility and given a resounding victory by a cardinal error in tactics by the Conservatives. Sir Charles Hibbert Tupper, passing through the constituency on his way from Vancouver to Nova Scotia, was induced to stop off in Brandon and address a public meeting; and a challenge was issued to Mr. Sifton to meet him on the public platform. He was campaigning at the time in Lisgar against his former friend Richardson; but when the challenge reached him he wired back that he was coming, and started post haste for Brandon. The Conservative leaders in Manitoba knew quite well that Sifton was never so dangerous as on the platform in a joint meeting; most of them had had the experience of being neatly trussed up by him in full view of the audience. But no doubt they regarded Sir Hibbert from the outside as more than a match for the local champion—human nature is like that. Sir Hibbert Tupper was the rising hope of the Conservative party until 1896, after which he suffered eclipse from a reason which probably had no parallel in political history. His father, still avid for power and distinction at seventy-five, forced himself into Dominion politics and seized the command of the party; thereafter the younger Tupper's career

was subordinate to that of his father and suffered the same extinction. Had Sir Charles, the senior, remained comfortably in the office of High Commissioner in London, the younger Sir Charles would inevitably have succeeded to the party leadership, following the defeat of 1896; and this would have led in time to the premiership. When he met Sifton on the platform in Brandon, in October 1900, he was the Crown Prince of the ruling Conservative dynasty, and in his own right he was a formidable political figure. He was not much older than his antagonist; he made a fine figure on the platform, with his handsome bearing and a beautiful speaking voice; and he had a thorough mastery of the art of public speaking. He could make speeches of high intellectual distinction; but for the purpose of giving young Mr. Sifton a trimming in his own home town he chose his best rough-and-tumble manner.

The Tupper-Sifton clash was the most sensational platform duel ever seen in the west. In a somewhat cruder community it would have been honoured by a ballad or, at any rate, by a "Come-all-ye"; as it was it became the starting-point of stories which, gathering embroidery as they went, became in a brief time fabulous. In more than one fictional work dealing with western life the Sifton-Tupper encounter has served to supply colour. But the story needs no embellishments; in its plain outlines it is dramatic enough. The meeting was held in the town rink, which was packed to the doors. Special trains brought people from outside points in the province, while from an area thirty miles around the people came in, mostly by carriage or on horseback—the motor age was just dawning. On the platform sat the rivals, surrounded by their seconds; they were divided by the whole width of the platform.

In an atmosphere of high tension Sir Charles Hibbert rose to deliver the attack. It proved to be pretty much a rehash of his speeches in the House about the Klondike.



Every charge, every suggestion of wrong-doing, every hint or innuendo that had been put out in the whole raging controversy was dressed up in its highest colours and trotted out on the platform. He dwelt particularly upon alleged favouritism shown to A. E. Philp of Brandon, a former partner of Sifton's who had been permitted to secure valuable rights. He understood Philp had stated in a letter that he was a partner of Sifton and Walsh. Sir Hibbert disclaimed having any personal knowledge; but he was satisfied conditions in the Yukon were bad.<sup>1</sup> He stressed the fact that parliamentary investigation had been refused. All this was delivered in a confident down-right vigorous manner, immensely pleasing to the Conservative partisans.

Mr. Sifton replied with equal vigour. It was his fixed custom to speak with studied moderation on the platform; but on this occasion he came pretty near to cutting loose, and giving the audience a complete statement of his private thoughts about the manner in which he had been pursued. Of all his speeches that are extant this is the one in which the language is sharpest, the sentences most direct; in which the temper in which it was delivered is revealed most clearly in the text. Sir Hibbert's charges, he said, were admittedly hearsay; they were the result of an organized attempt to collect complaints and insinuations from disappointed miners and adventurers. He had always declined in parliament and out of it to take the risk of putting his personal reputation behind the charges. Mr. Philp had got no leases in the Yukon to which he was not entitled. He quoted his letter to Mr. Philp, the text of which has already been given. He had no interest in Mr. Philp's ventures. Thus, as in parliament, he took the charges in turn, commented upon them and denied them.

<sup>1</sup>I never was in the Yukon and I never pretended to have any direct personal knowledge of what was going on in the Yukon, either in the House of Commons or here.—*Sir Charles Hibbert Tupper, at Brandon, October 14, 1900, as reported in Manitoba Free Press.*

Had his address been limited to this, honours would have been easy, and the meeting would have dispersed with each side satisfied that its champion had had the best of the argument; but as Sifton approached his time limit his speech took on an added vigour and significance. He recalled to the memory of the audience the fact that in November 1899 Sir Charles Tupper the elder, speaking in Brandon, had made the charge that Mr. Philp had been permitted illegally to take liquor into the Klondike, and that in this illegal operation he had as secret partner, one Clifford Sifton. He reminded the audience that he had at the time characterized the statement as a lie, and that Mr. Philp had immediately taken action in the courts for damages. He now proposed, he said, to give the audience the subsequent history of this action. Sir Charles, he explained, had secured the postponement of this trial until this was no longer possible, whereupon, faced with the necessity of supplying evidence in support of the charge, he had made a settlement. Thereupon Sifton read to the astonished audience a letter to Mr. Philp from Sir Charles Tupper's lawyer, in which he said that he was authorized to say that Sir Charles would sign a statement withdrawing the charge of improper action by Mr. Philp, and disclaiming any intention of associating Mr. Sifton with Mr. Philp.<sup>1</sup> While the audience were taking in this remarkable statement, Sifton strode down the platform; slapped the lawyer's letter down on the table before the startled eyes of Mr. Andrew Kelly, the chairman; and in a voice that rang through the rink like a pealing trumpet, said: "If this gentleman (turning to Sir Hibbert) will place some

<sup>1</sup>F. H. Phippen, barrister of Winnipeg, acting on behalf of Sir Charles Tupper, in a letter to Mr. Philp, undertook to get the signature of Sir Charles to a letter of apology in which it was stated: "I have satisfied myself that there is no ground for believing that yourself or Mr. Sifton were concerned together in taking or attempting to take liquor into the Yukon territory. I sincerely regret if anything which I said has been construed into a reflection on your character." The full text of Mr. Phippen's letter appeared in the *Manitoba Free Press*, October 15, 1900.



of his statements in a categorical form in the same way, he will have the pleasure of signing a document like this or paying damages."

At this the meeting rose! It was, for all practical purposes, over, although poor Sir Hibbert had for another half hour to go through the motions of making a second speech. By very defective staff work by the Conservatives Sir Hibbert had not been advised of the settlement of the case, and had been permitted to walk straight into the ambush. The meeting put the result in Brandon beyond doubt. In due time a majority of 747, which was large having regard to the total vote, was registered against the Honourable Hugh John Macdonald. The position of Premier of Manitoba having been neatly annexed in the interval by Rodmond P. Roblin, who had not even been a member of his government, Mr. Macdonald made his third and final retirement from public life.

In the general election the government was triumphantly returned. Sir Charles Tupper was himself defeated, and though Sir Hibbert held his seat in parliament he shared in his father's eclipse. The leaderless Conservatives went to Nova Scotia for a chief, but their choice fell upon Robert L. Borden of Halifax.

Sifton's triumph over the combined power of the two great Conservative families, the Tupper and Macdonalds, made him the hero of the campaign. After the voting, meetings in glorification of the Brandon triumph were held in Winnipeg and other points in the west; and upon his return to the east he was the guest of honour at a great banquet in Toronto. If Sifton was the young Napoleon this was his Austerlitz.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### THE ALASKAN BOUNDARY DISPUTE

I have often regretted, Mr. Speaker, and never more than on the present occasion, that we are living beside a great neighbour who, I believe I can say without being deemed unfriendly to them, are very grasping in their national actions—who are determined on every occasion to get the best in any agreement which they make. —*Laurier: on the Alaskan Boundary Award.*

THE proceedings ending in the settlement of the Alaskan boundary dispute constitute, in fact, one of the turning points of Canadian history. The rankling sense of injustice which followed Canada's defeat in this matter has passed away; and the material inconvenience of having the only available entrance to a part of Canada in United States territory is no longer an occasion of friction, largely owing to the petering out of the Klondike goldfields. But one of its consequences was important and abiding. It planted the idea in a great many Canadian minds that the time had about come for Canada to take charge of her external affairs. The incident supplied evidence, which was conclusive to a great many Canadians, that the British government could not be counted upon to push a Canadian interest to a point where the general interests of the Empire were, in its opinion, injuriously affected.

There was a flare-up of general indignation, which in the more reflective minds gave way to an understanding of the difficulties of the British position, and a recognition that Canada should put herself in the position where she could fight for her rights in her own way. The nationalist movement which, without advertisement or organization, proceeded steadily thereafter to the conquest of the Canadian



mind, dates in fact from the episode of the finding of the Alaskan Boundary Commission. It revealed to a great many Canadians their real, as contrasted with their nominal feeling on the question of Canadian subordination. It was a common observation at the time that if upon their return to Canada the dissenting Canadian Commissioners had given the Canadian people a lead, with Laurier and Sifton backing them, public opinion would have supported radical action. Nothing of this sort was desired by responsible parties; nevertheless both Laurier and Sifton took advantage of the situation to declare that henceforth Canada would attend to similar matters, if they arose, herself. There is nothing in the record to indicate that up to this time Mr. Sifton had given much thought to the matter of Canada's relations with Great Britain; but he came back to Canada in November 1903 essentially nationalist in spirit and outlook, and so remained.

When it was finally decided to submit the boundary dispute to a so-called Judicial Commission, Mr. Sifton (in March 1903) was appointed British agent; and as such had charge of the Canadian case. Back of this agreement of the disputing nations to refer the matter to a commission there had been a series of incidents, which left him with no illusions as to the role for which Canada was cast in the tragedy which was planned. Speaking about this many years afterwards he used language like this:

"The Commission was agreed to, simply to give effect to a decision which had already, in fact, been made. The proceedings from the American point of view were to be simply a matter of form. But the Canadians put up such a fight and made out such a case, that the United States' representatives got alarmed; and diplomatic methods of the strong-arm variety had to be resorted to to gain their end."

It does not come within the scope of this work to deal in detail with the boundary dispute; but, as can be easily



SIR CLIFFORD SIFTON  
During the Alaskan Boundary arbitration in London





established by a reference to the documents, it can be said that the dispute was genuine. That is to say, there were two sides to it. Canada had a case, not overwhelming, quite possibly not even conclusive; but the Canadian grievance then, actually, and historically in retrospect, is that Canada did not have a chance to plead its case before a tribunal willing to listen to it on its merits, and give judgment accordingly. The Canadians who were engaged in the case knew this at the time and reports of their discontent found their way into public print;<sup>1</sup> and it was the burden of the passionate outbursts in Canada that followed the announcement of the award. For these outbursts the Canadians were reproved by the superior British and American Press; they had, it was declared, lost in a fair fight before a judicial body, and they should accept the result in a sportsmanlike spirit. But as the facts antecedent to and concurrent with this meeting of the commission come out—as they do in increasing volume from letters, memoirs, etc.—it is seen that the Canadians were completely justified in their fears and suspicions. The United States hold the territory which was in dispute, with their title to it certified by the Alaskan Boundary Commission; but morally the situation is not much better than it would be if President Roosevelt had yielded to the impulse to which he confessed, and had taken possession of the territory by force and fixed the boundary to suit himself.

The United States' contention in the Alaskan boundary dispute was that "coast", as set out in the Anglo-Russian treaty of 1825, meant the indentations of every bay and

<sup>1</sup>Thus at the opening of the Conference Reuter's and the British Press Association circulated a report that a rumour had reached Canada from London sources that the decision might be influenced by motives of foreign policy: "The Canadian people feel", said the report, "that they are right in this dispute. They know that Great Britain, actuated by the best intentions, has more than once sacrificed Canadian interests. They will be irritated beyond measure if a similar policy is followed in the Alaskan case." The circulation of such reports was deprecated by the British Press as improper.



every inlet, however narrow, into which tide-water entered; whereas it was the Canadian view that it followed the general direction of the shore, passing by the indentations. The treaty provided that the boundary should follow the crest of the mountains parallel to the coast, but should at no place be further removed from it than ten marine leagues (about thirty-five miles). The Canadians held that there was such a range of mountains. The American claim was that there were no mountains parallel to the coast which conformed to the provisions of the treaty; therefore the boundary ran everywhere thirty-five miles from the actual shore line. North of Dyea and Skagway there were undeniable mountains, as those who wearily pushed their way over the White and Chilkoot passes knew only too well; nevertheless, in the early months of 1898, after the Canadians had established customs and police posts on the northern slope of these mountains, the United States authorities declared that the true boundary was at Lake Bennett, thirty-five miles from Dyea.

An "incident" was narrowly escaped over this claim, for Mr. Sifton, when he heard of the United States claim, ordered Superintendent Perry to take possession with forty mounted policemen of the northern side of the summit and stay there. Writing to Commissioner Walsh, April 1st 1898, Mr. Sifton set out on his reasons for this action in these words:

"The difficulty was that the officers of the United States Government asserted their jurisdiction down to and including the lower half of Lake Bennett, and a military force of the United States army was already detailed to go to Skagway. This force was gathered at Portland, and in another ten days would have been in possession of the territory down to Lake Bennett, and it would have taken twenty years of negotiating to get them out, in fact I doubt if we would ever have got them out. To prevent the loss of this territory I sent secret orders to Major Perry to send up Steele and forty more men, and plant out posts in the Passes just under

the Summit, and had them there with a supply of provisions before the other party knew what we were doing. It is a case of possession being ten points in the law, and we intend to hold possession. The United States authorities have now been communicated with through diplomatic channels, and we intend to hold the territory if we possibly can."

This manoeuvre was effective; and the line at the Summit was provisionally accepted by the United States in 1899.

The third point in the dispute was whether the Portland Channel described in the treaty ran north or south of four islands lying some ten or fifteen miles north and northwest of Port Simpson.

These were the issues in the boundary dispute; upon them the Canadians had an argument to present, and they sought diligently and for years, but unavailingly, to get an impartial tribunal before whom they could present them.

## II

The Joint High Commission which met in 1898 and 1899 to settle difficulties between Canada and the United States, broke up with nothing accomplished, because no agreement could be reached as to how the Alaskan boundary dispute should be settled. The Canadian delegates suggested arbitration by a tribunal of three, the third member to be in effect an umpire. This was rejected by the United States members, who made a suggestion not acceptable to the Canadians—the reference to a tribunal of six jurists: three appointed by the United States and three by the British. With the adjournment of the commission this question was remitted to the governments, and for the next three years three-cornered negotiations went on intermittently—from Ottawa, to London, to Washington and back again. Following promptly upon the adjournment, the British government renewed the proposition that the provisions of the newly negotiated treaty with Venezuela, for the delimitation



of the boundary between that country and British Guiana, be applied to a settlement of the Alaskan dispute. The United States had urged the making of this treaty and had approved the arbitration procedure which it authorized. This provided for an arbitration tribunal with an impartial umpire. The United States rejected the proposition.

The Canadian Government then suggested to the British Government that before completing the Hay-Pauncefote treaty, by which Great Britain renounced interests in Central America for the advantage of the United States, then being negotiated, a request be made upon the United States for concessions in Alaska; but the British Government did not think it desirable to tie the two questions together. In 1901 Mr. Hay again urged arbitration by a tribunal, upon which British and American representatives would be in equal numbers, with an understanding that in any case existing towns and settlements on tide-water should not be transferred to Canadian jurisdiction. This was simply a revival of the 1899 proposal, which Canada had already rejected.

In 1902 the British Government offered to accept the American proposition of a reference to a judicial body of six, provided that two of the judges were citizens neither of the United States or of any British country. This was declined by the United States at the instance of President Roosevelt, who was giving this question his personal attention. The situation was one of growing tension. In the United States cities on the Pacific Coast there was constant expressions of indignation at this "trumped-up" claim of Canada, directed against their hopes of profit through trade with the Canadian Yukon; and it became pretty generally known that the President was at one with them in their condemnation of the "impudence" of the Canadian attitude.

The British Government began to worry over possible clashes and other unpleasant developments; and the more it worried the more merit it saw in the United States pro-

posal. At Ottawa they began worrying too, but not about possible troubles along the boundary. What disturbed them was their apprehension that at any time the British Government might approach them with the suggestion that, for the sake of peace and quietness, they should agree to the United States propositions. The Colonial Conference was about to meet in London and this would afford an excellent opportunity for applying pressure. Upon the eve of Sir Wilfrid Laurier's departure for London a self-constituted sub-committee of the cabinet, made up of four or five of its most active members, Sifton included, called upon him, warned him that an attempt would be made while he was in England to get him to agree to a reference of the boundary dispute to a commission without an umpire, and urged him not to yield. Laurier declared his intention of upholding without flinching the Canadian contention. Upon his return in October he told his colleagues that he had given his word to the British Government that Canada would accept a reference of the boundary dispute to an even-numbered commission, appointed by the parties to the dispute. Pressed for details he refused to go beyond the statement that he had no option but to yield the point.

Laurier thus confronted his colleagues with the accomplished fact, which was his preferred expedient for the solving of difficult questions. Sifton and one or two other Ministers were in the mood for precipitating a first-class row in the Cabinet; but the time was not propitious. There was already a cabinet crisis of a sort arising from the indiscretions of Mr. Tarte; and it was evident that Sir Wilfrid was in a very doubtful state of health.<sup>1</sup>

With Canadian acquiescence thus assured there was a renewal of diplomatic contacts between London and Wash-

<sup>1</sup>The writer is aware that this account of the development is outside the record as usually given. It is, however, based on specific statements made to him at the time by Mr. Sifton.



ington, with early results. Laurier returned to Canada on October 18th, and broke the news to his colleagues. On October 31st, there came a despatch to the Canadian Government from Joseph Chamberlain, the Colonial Secretary, saying that the United States Secretary of State had unofficially renewed their proposal for a "judicial" tribunal. Did this, he blandly enquired, meet with the approval of the Canadian Ministers? By December, President Roosevelt was telling Senator Henry Cabot Lodge that he was going to make one more effort to settle the Alaskan boundary question, by referring it not "to an ordinary arbitration tribunal with an umpire" but to a "judicial commission" of the kind upon which the United States had insisted from the outset. He gave the Senator a draft of the convention which he proposed to submit to the British Government. Senator Lodge went over the convention and carefully deleted the reference to the Commission as an "arbitration tribunal". "I felt," said Mr. Lodge, "that the word 'arbitration' should go out and that it should be clearly a tribunal of a different kind."<sup>1</sup>

A convention in keeping with these desires of the President was signed January 24th, 1903. Senator Lodge was entrusted with the task of getting the approval of the Senate. Thereupon Senators from the Northwest States waited upon Senator Lodge and advised him that it was necessary that they should know who the United States' representatives were to be, before they could consent to the ratification of the convention. "They could not," in Senator Lodge's words, "agree to having anybody on that tribunal who would yield on the American claim." The President authorized him to inform these watchful Senators that he proposed to appoint Elihu Root, the United States Secretary of War, Senator George Turner of the State of Washington, (in

<sup>1</sup>See Senator Lodge's statement in "Transactions of the Massachusetts Historical Society" for April 1925 quoted in *Canadian Historical Review*, December 1925, page 332.

which State Seattle was located) and Senator Lodge himself. As they perfectly fitted the requirement of being committed before argument to maintain the United States contention, they were satisfactory to these Senators, and the convention was approved by the Senate on February 11th.

By the convention creating the Commission it was stipulated that the members of this court were to be "impartial jurists". On February 13th, Sir Michael Herbert, the British Minister in Washington, was unofficially advised that the American "impartial jurists" were to be Messrs. Root, Lodge and Turner. Sir Michael immediately made strong private protests to John Hay, United States Secretary of State, and repeated them a few days later to no avail. The President had got "his back up", and wanted it understood that no one had any right to dictate to him as to whom he should appoint. Sir Michael, reporting these facts privately to Sir Wilfrid, added the hope that the Canadian Government would not "break off, for you realize as well as I do what this would mean." In other letters Sir Michael said he did not dare to write what he felt about the situation. Lodge's appointment was due entirely to the President. Sir Michael was "sore" about the "unfortunate selection made by the President", but, as the result of his conversation with Mr. Hay, he feared it would be inadvisable and useless to protest.

Sir Michael Herbert was not alone in Washington in feeling scandalized at the President's implementation of his solemn engagements to appoint "impartial jurists". His views were shared by at least one other man in the United States capital: no less a person than John Hay, United States Secretary of State. Senator Lodge says in the memorandum from which quotation has already been made:

"When Mr. Hay heard of the three men whom the President had selected he was extremely displeased, and protested in the strongest way to the President against Mr.



Root, and even more strongly against me, taking the ground that our opinions were already well known, which was also true of Senator Turner."

Honour to the memory of John Hay!

On February 17th, the British Parliament opened. In the speech from the Throne it was stated that a treaty had been made with the United States, dealing with the boundary and announcing that it would be ratified. On the day following, February 18th, the British Government asked the Canadian Government if it had any comments to make upon the United States selections for the Commission. The Canadian Government had comments to make and it proceeded to make them. The appointment of Secretary Root, while not such as was contemplated by the treaty, might perhaps be accepted; but the appointments of Senator Lodge and Turner were extremely objectionable. They could not be regarded as impartial jurists. A speech by Senator Lodge at Northampton, Mass., on October 16th, 1902, was quoted, indicating a fixed determination on his part not to admit the correctness of the Canadian position in any way whatever.<sup>1</sup> Senator Turner was known as one of the strongest opponents of any settlement that would give Canadians access to the sea. The appointments indicated that the only possibility of a judgment by a majority, would be found in the assent of one or more of the British members to the American contention. This, it was noted, was the view almost uniformly taken by the American press.

For these reasons the Canadian Government hoped that

<sup>1</sup>In this speech Senator Lodge accused Mr. Gaston, Democratic candidate for the governorship of Massachusetts, with having expressed his willingness to see the Alaskan boundary question settled as part of an arrangement for reciprocal trade. The Canadian claim, he said, was "manufactured and baseless." This was the first time that any public man in the United States had proposed to surrender the soil of the United States to Great Britain for any reason whatever. No American president could ever be found, in his opinion, who would think for one moment of making such a surrender. "You may rest absolutely assured that it will never be made by Theodore Roosevelt."

the British Government would endeavour to secure the appointment of American members who would be free from reasonable objection. In a subsequent dispatch February 21st, the Canadian Government said that they had agreed to a court of six members, on the stipulation conveyed in the treaty that the members of this court should be impartial jurists. These considerations, having been material in causing their consent to the treaty, should be made good. Otherwise the whole situation might require reconsideration. On February 26th, the British Government cabled that they were as much surprised as the Canadians at the American nominations, but "it would be useless to press the United States to withdraw the names put forward, and arguments against the personal fitness of the three American representatives, however convincing, would fail to lead to any practical result." The Canadian Government, showing a pertinacious disposition to continue the discussion, the British Government cut the matter short by ratifying the treaty (which could be done by executive action) and on March 3rd, ratifications were exchanged with the United States.<sup>1</sup> There was nothing left for Canada but to accept the situation and make the best of it.

It was about this time that Mr. Sifton, who was in charge of the Canadian case, gave plain expression to his views in a letter to the writer of this book:

"As you have no doubt already sized the matter up, the British Government deliberately decided about a year

<sup>1</sup>"Without waiting for a definite reply from Canada, the British government exchanged formal ratification of the treaty. When the cabinet expressed displeasure at being thus flouted by London as well as by Washington, the Colonial Office blandly replied that no discourtesy had been intended, but that the British government had conceived itself bound by its announcement in the Speech from the Throne on February 17 that the treaty would be ratified,—that is, by an announcement which had been made a day before the Colonial Office had gone through the form of asking if the Canadian Government had any opinion to offer."—Skelton's *Life of Laurier*, Vol. II, page 145.



ago to sacrifice our interests at any cost, for the sake of pleasing the United States. All their proceedings since that time were for the sake of inveigling us into a position from which we could not retire. I am bound to say that we have been pretty easy prey, but the result probably would have been the same in any event, as it simply gets down to a very narrow question. The United States would not recede, and England would not take any chances of a quarrel.

"It is, however, the most cold-blooded case of absolutely giving away our interests, without even giving us the excuse of saying we have had a fight for it, which I know of, and I do not see any reason why the Canadian press should not make itself extremely plain upon the subject. My view, in watching the diplomacy of Great Britain as affecting Canada for six years, is that it may just as well be decided in advance that practically whatever the United States demands from England will be conceded in the long run, and the Canadian people might as well make up their minds to that now."

### III

After the ratification of the treaty the Canadian Government proceeded without delay to organize their forces. Mr. Sifton was named British agent; and set about getting together the strongest possible array of counsel. Edward Blake took charge of the case; associated with him were Sir Robert Finlay, Attorney-General, and Christopher Robinson of Toronto. Fred C. Wade became Mr. Sifton's executive agent; among juniors who toiled in the preparation of the case were three who were destined to have great careers. These were Lyman P. Duff, now a Justice of the Supreme Court at Ottawa, John A. (now Sir John) Simon, and Aime Geoffrion of Montreal. After two months of preparation Mr. Blake was forced by ill health to withdraw from the case—a heavy loss to the Canadian side; and his place was taken, with the hearing little more than a month away by the Solicitor-General Sir Edward Carson. Officials from the department supplied expert assistance. There was the required exchange of cases and counter cases, and on Sep-

tember 3rd, in spacious offices in the Foreign Office in London, the case opened.

The British members of the Commission were Lord Alverstone, Lord Chief Justice of England, Sir Louis A. Jetté, Lieutenant-Governor of Quebec, formerly a Canadian Judge, and A. B. Aylesworth, a distinguished Toronto lawyer. Mr. Aylesworth took a place on the Commission on short notice upon the death of Mr. Justice Armour of the Ontario Bench, who had been originally named. For more than a month the case in all aspects was argued back and forth by the eminent counsel for the two countries, and the Commissioners sat and listened with due judicial gravity. Nevertheless, all this imposing procedure was mostly by-play. The forces in actual control were operating behind the façade.

From revelations made since that time in various publications a reasonably connected story of the non-judicial activities that went on can be pieced together. Senator Lodge, by his statement published in the *Transactions of the Massachusetts Historical Society* and his published letters to President Roosevelt<sup>1</sup> is one of our principal sources of enlightenment. On March 25th, 1903, three weeks after their appointments, the three American Commissioners were instructed by the President that the Canadian claim that the boundary, rightly placed, would put the headwaters of Lynn Canal in Canadian territory, could not properly be considered open to discussion. There might be room for discussion as to the width of the strip, but upon the proposition that it ran in an unbroken belt along the shores and indentations, thus everywhere shutting out Canada from the sea, there must be no compromise. On July 16th, the President wrote to the Senator, who was then in London, that the matter must be settled one way or the other before the

<sup>1</sup>*Selections from the correspondence of Theodore Roosevelt and Henry Cabot Lodge, 1884-1918.*



assembling of Congress in November, as in the event of failure it would be necessary for him to recommend action. (This explains the peremptory refusal by the United States Government of the request by the Canadian Government for an enlargement of the time allotted for the preparation of the counter-case). This, the President explained, was the "last chance" of reaching an agreement "by the free act of both parties". Senator Lodge showed this letter to Henry White, secretary of the United States Embassy, who admitted that he was "a little alarmed" by it.

On July 30th, Senator Lodge writes that "there really is no need for oral arguments," an observation that might be bracketed with his later remark in a letter to the President, when the hearings were going on, that the "decision does not depend upon the arguments". Although the meeting of the Commission was five weeks off when he wrote his July 30th letter, he has already given up hope of the Canadian members of the Commission. They are so "perfectly stupid" as not to see that since they cannot win they ought to welcome an adverse verdict. "They seem to fail utterly to see that a disagreement deprives them of their only chance to get out of the matter creditably." On August 30th, the Senator is confirmed in his opinion that nothing can be expected from the two Canadians. The only question was whether Lord Alverstone would go with the Americans. "Very possibly he will, but England is in such mortal terror of Canada that I feel more than doubtful in regard to it!" On September 5th, he wrote that he and his colleagues did not feel hopeful. But the resources of strong-arm diplomacy were not exhausted.

For the briefest possible summary of President Roosevelt's diplomatic stroke we can use his own words as reported by James Ford Rhodes, the American historian.<sup>1</sup> On November 16th, 1905, Rhodes dined at the White

<sup>1</sup>M. A. De Wolfe Howe, *James Ford Rhodes*, page 121.

House, and made in his diary brief notations of the President's conversation. Roosevelt talked of the Alaskan boundary difficulty and how he had dealt with it. Choate (United States Minister to London) had favoured arbitration, but he said "No". The memorandum continues:

"Letter the President wrote in 1903 to Justice Holmes. English object to Lodge and Root because their opinions were known. The President said Canada (had) no more right to that territory than it has to Nantucket. If the Commission fails to settle the question, I shall move troops into the territory. He asked Justice Holmes to impart this to Chamberlain. Holmes showed Chamberlain the letter. He wrote substantially the same thing to Henry White to be imparted to Balfour. The English Government, he thinks, tipped the wink to the Chief Justice."

The full text of President Roosevelt's letter to Mr. Justice O. W. Holmes can be read in his official biography.<sup>1</sup> The Canadians had no case; and the alternatives were to have a commission "and give a chance for agreement" (i.e. by the commission finding against Canada), or to run the boundary line on his own hook, as he would do if the Commission failed. "But if there is a disagreement I wish it distinctly understood, not only that there will be no arbitration of the matter, but that in my message to Congress I shall take a position which will prevent any possibility of arbitration hereafter." This meant, he explained, that he would take authority from Congress "to run the line as we claim it by our own people, without any further regard to the attitude of England and Canada". In the letter there was this suggestive sentence: "If you happen to meet Chamberlain again you are entirely at liberty to tell him what I say, although of course it must be privately and unofficial." The hint being fairly plain, Judge Holmes sought Mr. Chamberlain out and passed along the information by showing him the letter.

<sup>1</sup>Bishop's *Theodore Roosevelt and His Times*, Vol. I, page 258.



The letter to Henry White, to which President Roosevelt referred, was not sent directly to him. Senator Lodge turned over the letters which he had received from the President, to Mr. White: Mr. White showed them to Mr. Balfour. During the anxious ten days which intervened between the conclusion of the argument and the rendering of the decision, Senator Lodge met Mr. Balfour at Mr. White's house and talked to him "in confidence". Mr. Balfour, he says in his memorandum, was extremely anxious; he stood up before the fire, and said that the dispute was full of peril and must be settled.

In such "friendly" and "judicial" manner did President Roosevelt make his contribution to the solution of the Alaskan boundary difficulty. First he refused to arbitrate. Then he obtained a reference of the case to a judicial commission, with an equal division of judges. He thereupon appointed three judges who were pledged not to concede the chief matter at issue, the ownership of the headwaters of the inlets, no matter what arguments the Canadian advocates might advance. Having thus made it impossible to lose, he played for victory by methods and arguments which had no relation to judicial procedure. The argument which was perhaps most strongly stressed by the United States counsel—the alleged acquiescence of Great Britain in the United States occupation of the disputed territory—was one only applicable to arbitration proceedings; as Lord Alverstone said during the argument, in a case like that before the court, in which nothing could be considered except the legal rights conferred by treaty, there was nothing valid in arguments about estoppel and time limitations. In addition to disowning the judicial procedure after it had served his purpose, and resorting to the tactics of arbitration which he had theoretically rejected, he resorted to diplomatic pressure of the crudest and least defensible sort. And all these elabor-

ate shifts—the refusal to arbitrate, the rigging of the court, the bald threats of violence, were justified by President Roosevelt and are still justified by his apologists by the astonishing plea that they were necessary because Canada had no case.<sup>1</sup> That the victory thus achieved was diplomatic and not judicial in character was at once admitted by the President, in his joy at the result. It was promptly described by him as the greatest diplomatic success achieved by the United States for a generation.<sup>2</sup>

#### IV

Did Lord Alverstone, when he prevented a disagreement by joining with the United States Commissioners to form a majority of the court, act in a diplomatic or judicial capacity? President Roosevelt, as has been seen, regarded his action as diplomatic. The British Government, he surmised, had tipped him the wink; and he had governed himself accordingly. The belief that he would prevent a deadlock by, if necessary, joining the Americans, was current in all three capitals; except for a slight temporary panic at the vigour with which the Canadians presented their case, Wash-

<sup>1</sup>One of the most thorough-going of President Roosevelt's apologists is his English biographer Lord Charnwood. "When the new commission was to meet", says Lord Charnwood in his *Theodore Roosevelt*, page 131, "Roosevelt took a step characteristically drastic and characteristically gentle in manner to make a miscarriage unlikely—or in other words to prevent any influence that might make the Lord Chief Justice vote wrong." The end of the whole business, according to Lord Charnwood, was entirely satisfactory; "the sufficiently high-spirited British Minister to whom more particularly this pressure was applied obviously felt no offence; nor need anybody feel aggrieved about it now."

<sup>2</sup>Washington despatch in the *Times*, October 21st. This comment by Roosevelt appears in all the newspaper reports of the time. It appears in the London *Daily Express* of October 21st in this form: "This is the greatest diplomatic victory of our time."



ington was easy in mind as to the outcome.<sup>1</sup> There was discussion in the Canadian parliament over a rumour that Lord Alverstone had been saying to people that the Americans had the better case; to this report he cabled a categorical denial. Whereas the American Commissioners met constantly in conference, there was no such team-play on the British side. The Canadian Commissioners and the Canadian counsel became convinced that Lord Alverstone was determined that there should be an award, thus obviating the possibility of trouble between the British and United States Governments.

On October 7th, the day before the oral argument closed, Clifford Sifton sent the following cable to Sir Wilfrid Laurier: "I think that Chief Justice intends to join Americans deciding in such a way as to defeat us on every point. We all think that Chief Justice's intentions are unjustifiable, and due to predetermination to avoid trouble with United States. Jetté and Aylesworth are much exasperated, and considering withdrawing from Commission."

To this Sir Wilfrid sent this reply: "Our Commissioners must not withdraw. If they cannot get our full rights let them put up a bitter fight for our contention on Portland Canal, which is beyond doubt: that point must be decided in Canada's favour. Shame Chief Justice and carry that point. If we are thrown over by Chief Justice, he will give

<sup>1</sup>A good illustration of the confidence that was general in Washington is furnished by a despatch in the Seattle Post-Intelligencer from Washington, August 20th, announcing that the government was planning to mark the Alaskan boundary, whether or not the commission came to an agreement. The correspondent added: "Although the administration's policy in the boundary matter might seem to be non-diplomatic, and in its possibilities even hostile and warlike, there is no idea that the relations between this country and Great Britain will become seriously strained. The notion has taken strong hold on the administration that the foreign office at London doesn't care a fig for the Canadian contention in regard to the boundary line. In fact the belief has grown that one of the British Commissioners will admit the soundness of the American argument and vote in its favour."

the last blow to British diplomacy in Canada. He should be plainly told this by our Commissioners."

When Sir Louis Jetté and Mr. Aylesworth refused to sign the award, on the ground that they did not consider it a judicial finding, Lord Alverstone was cut to the quick, and in letters to Sir Louis Jetté, Mr. Aylesworth, Sir Wilfrid Laurier and Mr. Sifton he protested against this reflection upon his conduct. There was a subsequent interchange of letters between Lord Alverstone and Mr. Aylesworth. In one of these letters Mr. Aylesworth said to him: "I truly believe that your only motive in it all was the one you gave to us—that you knew unless you did these things there could be no award, and you could not view such a result as other than an international calamity." The evidence in support of this estimate is so strong as to be practically conclusive. In the difficult position in which he found himself Lord Alverstone regarded it as his first duty to make sure that there would be an award; he could not understand the position taken by his colleagues that a disagreement was preferable to surrender. He undoubtedly hoped to be able to combine both functions—to render a decision that would square with his judicial obligations and yet make an award possible; and if it had not been for the last minute unreasonableness of the Americans in the matter of the Portland Channel, the conclusive proof that he was the diplomat before he was the judge would have been lacking. Collating the evidence supplied by Senator Lodge's letters to President Roosevelt with that available in letters and memoranda Canadian in origin, one sees the Lord Chief Justice busily engaged in the final stages of the case, like a distracted political chief trying to evolve a common policy for a warring cabinet. As early as September 24th, as we learn from Senator Lodge's letter to the President, when the argument was only about half over, he sounded out the United States Commissioners as to their attitude towards an award that



would keep the *lisière* (strip) unbroken but narrowed, in keeping with the Canadian argument that the mountains mentioned in the Anglo-Russian treaty of 1825 could be found; and would also fully meet the Canadian claim with respect to Portland Channel. Five days later the Senator writes the President that it is probable that they can get a decision in favour of a line running around the inlets; but he indicates that they may break up the conference sooner than agree to any narrowing of the strip. On October 12th, the Senator writes that Lord Alverstone is very set on his selected summits; but that the Americans will resist, and if they do not get their way there will be a disagreement.

Meanwhile, Lord Alverstone was saying to his Canadian colleagues that he was convinced the Canadian claim that the more northerly outlet of Portland Channel was the true channel, within the meaning of the treaty, was thoroughly sound; he further indicated his expectations that the American Commissioners would agree to this. We know on the authority of one of the Canadian Commissioners that Lord Alverstone did not discuss the other aspects of the dispute with his Canadian colleagues. Lord Alverstone undertook to draw up on behalf of the British Commissioners a statement supporting his views on Portland Channel; and on October 12th, the Commissioners, being then engaged in considering its finding, this statement was read by Lord Alverstone to them. Thus on October 12th the United States Commissioners knew, though the Canadian Commissioners did not, that Lord Alverstone would support the unbroken *lisière*, provided the Americans gave up their claim that it must be everywhere thirty-five miles wide; and the whole Commission knew that he supported the Canadian contention as to the northern channel being the true Portland Channel.

This would give to Canada four islands which, running from west to east, were named Kanaghannut, Sitklan,

Wales and Pearce. These islands were of value principally in a military sense; they lay at the mouth of that portion of Portland Channel which projects far inland, and they commanded Port Simpson which was then coming into prominence as the projected terminus of the new Canadian trans-continental railway. In the American case these islands were claimed by the United States on the ground that the true Portland Channel ran south and not north of the islands. In the printed cases and in the oral arguments the four islands were an entity; they were claimed—all of them—for Canada or for the United States.

The Americans, as we know from Senator Lodge's letter, were rebellious at the suggestion that the *lisière* should be narrowed; they threatened to withdraw sooner than consent. Nothing more, however, was heard of this objection; they accepted Lord Alverstone's boundary line which everywhere kept the strip, shutting out Canada from the water, intact. When the Commission met on Saturday, October 17th, to reach a final decision on Portland Channel, the Canadian Commissioners were astounded to find the three United States Commissioners and Lord Alverstone in agreement that Portland Channel going west ran north of Pearce and Wales island, and then turned sharply south through the passage known as Tongas Channel to the sea. In giving his vote Lord Alverstone said that his reason for giving it was his feeling that otherwise there would be no award.

This finding gave Canada the two landward, and the United States the two seaward islands. This division was in flat defiance of all the claims made by both countries, and of all the oral arguments that had been presented to the Commission; and it had the undisguised appearance of a diplomatic deal. Plainly what happened was that the Americans, unable to carry out their intention of refusing the narrowed *lisière*, sought compensation by forcing a com-



promise with respect to Portland Channel. Subsequently, Lord Alverstone wrote a memorandum in which he said that before the meeting of the tribunal on October 17th, one of the United States Commissioners notified him that unless the Portland Channel islands were divided they would not sign the award. In giving his written reasons for supporting this decision Lord Alverstone simply took his memorandum of October 12th, changed his conclusions and modified the text in one or two sentences. Taken to task the following Monday by Sir Louis Jetté and Mr. Aylesworth, Lord Alverstone defended his action as necessary and minimized its importance by saying that he had understood, from something Mr. Aylesworth had said in conference, that the two islands given to the United States were of no value.

These developments, of course, revealed Lord Alverstone not as the inflexible judge but as the adroit and pliable adjuster of difficulties. The discredit which justly attached to his Portland Channel decision spread inevitably to his judgment on the *lisière*, which may have been—and probably was—based upon a judicial examination of the facts. It would be idle to say that the Canadian claim to the heads of the inlets was unanswerable—as idle as to assert that it was “trumped-up” and foundationless. To read the reasoned statements of Lord Alverstone, Mr. Aylesworth and Sir Louis Jetté with discernment is to realize that there were strong arguments on both sides. The Canadian Commissioners, in their verbal exchange of views with Lord Alverstone, declared that not regarding the award as judicial they would not sign it. They were as good as their word; instead they issued an explanation to the people of Canada in which there were winged words which set the heather in Canada on fire: “We do not consider the finding of the tribunal as to the islands at the entrance of Portland Channel or as to the mountain line a judicial one, and we have therefore declined to be parties to the award. . . . We have been

compelled to witness the sacrifice of the interests of Canada, powerless to prevent it, though satisfied that the course the majority determined to pursue in respect to the matters above specially referred to, ignored the just rights of Canada."

Before the award was made public but with its tenor known there was an exchange of cablegrams in these terms between Clifford Sifton and Sir Wilfrid Laurier:

(Sifton to Laurier)

"London, October 17th.—Chief Justice has agreed with American Commissioners. Their decision will be to give us Wales and Pearce Islands, but give Americans two islands alongside, namely, Kanaghannut and Sitklan which command entrance to canal and destroy strategic value Wales and Pearce. Remainder of line substantially as contended for by Americans, except that it follows watershed at White Pass and Chilkoot. Our Commissioners strongly dissent. Decision likely to be Tuesday next. I regard it as wholly indefensible. What is your view? Course of discussion between Commissioners has greatly exasperated our Commissioners who consider matter as pre-arranged."

(Laurier to Sifton)

"Ottawa, October 18th. Concession to Americans of Kanaghannut and Sitklan cannot be justified on any consideration of treaty. It is one of those concessions which have made British diplomacy odious to Canadian people, and it will have most lamentable effect. Our Commissioners ought to protest in most vigorous terms."

The announcement of the rejection by the Boundary Commission of Canada's case reached Canada three days in advance of the official rendering of the award, by way of a forecast in a London despatch to the Associated Press, which was obviously inspired. There was deep-seated in the Canadian mind a traditional belief, whether it was well-founded or not, that in boundary disputes with the United States in which Canada was interested Great Britain always gave way; and following the announcement there was an



immediate expression of this feeling in the Canadian Press. The Toronto correspondent of the London *Daily Mail*, trying to convey an idea of the feeling in Toronto, cabled his paper: "Canadians are becoming weary of negotiating with Washington through London, and of the solemn and elaborate farces called arbitration which for one hundred and twenty years have been robbing Canada to enrich the United States. 'We should dicker for ourselves', said a Toronto newspaper to-day; and the sentiment is echoed everywhere."

Public feeling, already excited, was whipped into fury by the statement issued to the Canadian people by Sir Louis Jetté and Mr. Aylesworth. Accompanying it was an interview given the British Press by Clifford Sifton. "I do not profess", he said, "to understand the principle upon which the islands were given away. The mountain boundary line, while adopted as contended for by Canada, is drawn so far back that the United States gets practically all that she seriously contended for."<sup>1</sup> Canadians accepted the statements, which reinforced their own suspicions, that the award was diplomatic, and not judicial, the British Commissioner having submitted under pressure to the American demands. So far as public opinion can be judged by expressions in the

<sup>1</sup>Upon his return to Canada, Sifton gave a newspaper interview in which he said that in his judgment the Canadians had established their case with respect to Portland Channel, the location of the mountain ranges and the Canadian ownership of the heads of the inlets, except that British acquiescence in acts of occupation might have justified an exception in the case of Lynn Canal. He added: "I have nothing to say as to the judgment of Lord Alverstone, except that a most thorough and careful perusal of the reasons which he has given does not convince me that my opinion as above stated, is incorrect. I said the day after the decision, and I am prepared to repeat it now after the most careful examination and consideration, that I do not recognize the principle upon which the decision was given. . . . From the statement that was issued by Sir Louis Jetté and Mr. Aylesworth and the reasons given by the Canadian representatives in their formal opinions, I have concluded that they were perfectly justified in refusing to sign the decision."—*Manitoba Free Press*, November 9th, 1903.

public Press and by public men, there was in Canada a universal feeling of chagrin, disappointment and resentment.<sup>1</sup>

Very little attempt was made by the opposition party to turn the public indignation against the government. There was in the Press some criticism of the government for having receded from its original position that it would only submit its case to an arbitration tribunal; and this was repeated in Parliament by Mr. Borden. Other grounds of criticism by the Conservative leader were that the government had not insisted upon the appointment of three Canadian Commissioners, and upon the right of the Canadian parliament to ratify the award. But there was no suggestion of criticism of the manner in which the Canadian case had been handled by Mr. Sifton as British agent, and by the lawyers who had been associated with him. There was universal agreement that Canada had been brilliantly served, and that nothing had been over-looked in the presentation of the case. The case, in the rough and ready judgment of the Canadian people, had failed not on account of its weakness but because the question had been prejudged.

## V

The remarkable feature of the outburst of wrath following the award was that it was directed almost entirely against the British Government. President Roosevelt's direct inter-

<sup>1</sup>The Canadian Press comments though vigorously phrased, were mostly serious attempts to discuss the question. But the lampoon was not absent from otherwise serious editorial columns. Thus the following skit appeared in the *Toronto News*:

LORD ALVERSTONE (to Canada): Is there anything more I can do for you?

CANADA: We would like to go on drawing breath.

LORD ALVERSTONE (to Messrs. Root, Lodge and Turner): Any objection to our young friend continuing to use the atmosphere?

MESSRS. ROOT, LODGE and TURNER (cheerfully): None at all just now.

LORD ALVERSTONE (with a judicial air): My decision is that you are entitled to the temporary use of all air not required for United States purposes.



ference was not known at that time, or there would have been appropriate comments; but on the facts as known the general Canadian attitude was that the attempt of the Americans to cinch the result in advance having been made clear, Great Britain should have stood by Canada in blocking their plans. The possibility of serious trouble resulting from disagreement, with which the British official mind was so deeply engrossed, did not disturb the Canadians; they regarded hints that this would happen as nothing but a turn of the screw to increase the pressure. In the correspondence which went on after the award, between Lord Alverstone and Canadians who took part in the proceedings, he was told if there had been no award, instead of it being an international calamity it would have been a blessing to Great Britain and Canada. Mr. Sifton expressed the Canadian view in his speech to the Canadian Club in Ottawa on December 7th, 1903:

"At present," he said, "Canada was at the mercy of the British Commissioner in regard to commissions and arbitrations. Had Lord Herschell not stood by the Canadian Commissioners in the case of the joint High Commission, the negotiations (in 1899) would not have been broken off when Canada desired that they should be; but Lord Herschell did stand by Canada. The Alaskan commission was a precisely similar case; Lord Alverstone did not stand by the Canadian Commissioners and they refused to sign the award."

The grievance was thus primarily against Great Britain, not against the United States. Indeed in the friendly exchange of letters in which the British agent and the United States agent took leave of one another, Mr. Sifton wrote to the Honourable J. W. Foster:

"I do not think you need fear that the result will cause increasing bitterness or ill-feeling between Canada and the

United States. I am quite free to express my own sentiment as being in no way affected by the award. You and your counsel made a good fight, and you have the satisfaction of something for your labour. We also tried to make a good fight, but unfortunately have not much to show for it."

The instinctive outcome of this feeling was a determination, all but universal, that it must never happen again. This meant that henceforth Canada must take full charge in cases of this kind. Sir Wilfrid Laurier gave prompt expression to this sentiment in a speech in parliament delivered three days after the award was made:

"The difficulty as I conceive it is not there (with Lord Alverstone). The difficulty as I conceive it to be, is that so long as Canada remains a dependency of the British Crown, the present powers that we have are not sufficient for the maintenance of our rights. It is important that we should ask the British Parliament for more extensive powers, so that if we ever have to deal with matters of a similar nature again, we shall deal with them in our own way, in our own fashion, according to the best light we have."

While Laurier was making this statement in Ottawa, Mr. Aylesworth was giving expression to similar views in Liverpool in an interview which appeared in the *London Standard*. "To prevent a repetition of such a decision in the future the Canadian people would probably demand much larger powers of self-government."

These statements envisaging the constitutional position in the Empire which Canada now occupies, were accepted in Canada with acclamation. In this strong illumination of the inadequacies of the existing relationship, and with the revelation to themselves of their national spirit, the Canadian people passed at a single stride from the plane of willing dependency to one of conscious aspiration for the



powers of nationhood. A definite turning was taken although the goal lay far down the years.<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Sifton identified himself unreservedly with this view. In the address to the Ottawa Canadian Club, already noted, he said it was not a revolutionary proceeding for him to suggest that in all cases where Canada's interests were concerned the British Commissioners should be three Canadians. If the business were not well done the people of Canada would be responsible. It would put responsibilities upon Canadians which in the end would have a good effect. Instead of involving separation it would make Canada's relations with Great Britain less liable to friction than under conditions then existing. To a young journalist in St. Thomas, Ontario, (W. A. Buchanan, now a member of the Canadian Senate) he wrote: "The idea in the first place had been that they (the British Government) would give us only one Canadian representative and two British. Having one British and two Canadians was regarded as making a considerable concession to our views. Experience has shown, however, that it will be desirable to have the three in future cases." To Rev. John Potts, a leading clergyman of the Methodist Church, who asked for information he said:

<sup>1</sup>This statement by Sir Wilfrid Laurier was widely commented upon by the British Press. There were fatuous observations like that of the London *Globe* deprecating the use of language by Sir Wilfrid as "not compatible with that perfect loyalty to England which the Mother Country has a right to expect from all Colonial Prime Ministers"; but there was as well recognition that Sir Wilfrid's statement foreshadowed a constitutional development very different from that which most public men and journals at that time expected. "This", said the *Manchester Guardian* in the most prescient of all comments, "is indeed a remarkable passage. This demand for control over foreign affairs strikes at the very root of the Imperialist position, and if pressed must lead to a complete overhauling of the ordinary conceptions of Imperial and Colonial relations. We do not say that the process of overhauling would be an unwholesome one or inconsistent with the maintenance of very strong ties between us and the colonies, but that it would involve something of a constitutional revolution and the setting up of a colonial ideal in opposition to the Imperial ideal is not to be denied". To the *Times* it was a suggestion that pointed logically to separation.

"I think it would be safe to say that it is the conviction of Canadian people, who have given the matter attention, that upon the two points mentioned our interests were substantially sacrificed from diplomatic motives, and that so far from Canadians not understanding the international importance of the question as fully as Englishmen, the understanding is much clearer and fuller on this side than it is there. 2nd. That the surest way to raise up unreasonable demands on the part of the United States is to give way to them."

But much the most emphatic expression of his views was set out in a letter to A. M. Peterson, of Colborne, Ont., a former fellow-townsmen who wrote him warmly commending his work at London. This letter is reproduced, in almost its entirety, subject to explanation that the "independence" to which he looked forward was the independence which Canada now enjoys:

"So far as the work that we did in London was concerned, it was difficult from first to last. We had to overcome English inertia from the beginning to the end. In fact, when we started we were flatly told that what we proposed to do within the time limit was impossible. I feel somewhat gratified, however, to know that no one has been able to make a suggestion up to the present time that anything should have been done which was not done, or that anything could have been done any better than it was done. I only take credit to myself for seeing that the other people did their work, which I did with absolutely unrelenting determination. I was fortunate in having a remarkably capable staff who worked with loyalty and enthusiasm. It was perhaps fortunate that they did not see so far ahead as I did, otherwise their enthusiasm might have been dampened.

"It is beyond a question that the cold-blooded and somewhat supercilious conduct of our English friends has had a profound effect upon Canadian public opinion. There has not been much said that was not fully justified by the facts. It is extremely difficult for anyone in an official position to express himself freely on a subject of this kind, but I regard it as out of the question that the representation of Canada as it exists to-day will be content to do business in the way in which it has been done; and whether anything be done in the near future or not, a somewhat radical readjustment will



be required before a great while. I do not see why the aspirations of the young men of Canada for independence should be either suppressed or ridiculed. There are many countries much less strong in population and resources who find no difficulty in managing their own affairs."

## VI

The dispute over the Alaskan boundary viewed in retrospect illustrates how childish great nations can be in their international relations when under the influence of age-long illusions. The United States Government, in so stubbornly and unscrupulously maintaining the extremest possible interpretation of its territorial rights under the Anglo-Russian treaty, considered that it was defending the integrity of the soil of the United States against foreign aggression—a situation which, according to all the time-honoured maxims of patriotism, called for resistance to the death. Actually, the power and prestige of the United States were being exploited, to the embitterment of relations with a friendly country, in the hope that it might divert to the port of Seattle some of the trade of the Klondike, which would flow in Canadian channels if there was an all-Canadian approach to that region. The trade reasons which had induced Russia to negotiate with Great Britain for the recognition of the *lisière* along the coast no longer existed, when Alaska passed under the control of the United States; the strip remained as an historical memento of conditions that had disappeared.

There was justification for the sharp observation of the *Montreal Witness* that "the United States has not and never had any appreciable interest in the disputed territory except in its power to annoy and disable Canada." The adjustment of the boundary difficulty was a matter for friendly and reasonable statesmen, and not for lawyers poring in the musty archives of the foreign offices of St. Petersburg and London, in a hopeless attempt to discover what dead-and-

gone diplomats had agreed to do to meet a situation which was as dead as they were. Statesmen, looking forward instead of back, with some appreciation of the value of goodwill between nations, would have settled the boundary question in a week's discussion, by the United States, out of its wealth of harbours on the Lynn Canal, giving one of them to Canada either for some available material compensation or as a token of goodwill towards a kindred nation with which it had intimate trade and cultural relations.

Such a solution was indeed sought and almost found at the meeting of the Joint High Commission; it fell through for reasons set forth at the time by Sir Wilfrid Laurier in a letter to Principal Grant of Queen's University:<sup>1</sup> "Our American fellow-commissioners were at first and almost to the last disposed to come to a reasonable compromise. I may tell you confidentially that the compromise was that they gave us Pyramid Harbour on the Lynn Canal with everything but the official sovereignty in name; in other words, the arrangement which we had practically concluded was that we should have Pyramid Harbour under our jurisdiction, our laws and our administration, but that if, at any moment, we chose no longer to occupy it, it would revert to the United States. This arrangement provoked such a storm in the Pacific States that our fellow Commissioners withdrew their consent."

The reasons which the Canadian representatives freely gave for their dissatisfaction with the compromise which gave the United States two small islets, with a total area of seven square miles, will in retrospect have an increasingly curious air as the permanency of peace between the British nations and the United States becomes more and more assured. The United States, it was pointed out, could from these islets command the entrance to Portland Channel and

<sup>1</sup>Skelton: *Life and Letters of Sir Wilfrid Laurier*, Vol. II, page 132.



the harbour of Port Simpson. Those who held these apprehensions envisaged these islets as Gibaltars, with frowning battlements and serried batteries whose broadsides would carry death and destruction over twenty miles of surrounding waters. In his reasoned objections to Lord Alverstone's judgment Mr. Aylesworth said: "The islands (Sitklan and Kanaghannut) are of the utmost consequence, for they lie directly opposite to and command the entrance to the very important harbour of Port Simpson." In the letters which Lord Alverstone received from his Canadian correspondents in reply to letters written by him in justification of his course, still plainer language was used. "The Americans," he was told in one of these communications, "wanted these islands only because they command Port Simpson. Useless for any other purpose, they are useful to them as a perpetual menace and weapon of offence against us."

These statements as to American motives appear to be correct. If the Canadians were open to rebuke for making so much trouble over the loss of two small islands of no value, were not the American Commissioners still more open to censure for insisting upon the possession of these worthless isles at the cost of the consequences that ensued? It is a reasonable theory that both the American and Canadian Commissioners foresaw a time when the two countries would be at war, and sought for advantages for their countries looking forward to this conflict.

There were none of the expected fruits of victory from the United States' triumph. The Americans have the strip of land skirting the sea and interposing a barrier between the Canadian hinterland and its natural ports; but it is a wilderness, and must so remain until the hinterland is developed. The development of the Canadian territory which was looked for by the American private interests, chiefly responsible for the unyielding attitude taken by the United States Government, has not taken place; there has been

retrogression instead. Pyramid Harbour and Dyea are only names on the map; Skagway is hardly more than a reminder of the expectations that once centred about it. There may be some connection between the stagnation of the Klondike and the fact that it has been prevented from having its own port; in that case, as well as in its other aspects, the Alaskan boundary award was a loss to both sides to the controversy.

There were, however, notable consequences to this senseless international quarrel. It set Canada definitely on the road to nationhood. And it renewed the traditional Canadian fear and dislike of the United States which had been dying out, with an effect on national policies easily traceable in our history. One of the fruits of the United States victory on the Alaskan boundary was the defeat of the Reciprocity Pact in 1911.



## CHAPTER NINE

### RAILWAYS AND TARIFFS

The result of my observation is that there is no substitute for commonsense in the affairs of the world.—*Walter H. Page.*

#### I

THE result of the general election in 1900 solved many of Mr. Sifton's minor annoyances. Thereafter patronage troubles make little appearance in his letters, though the gentlemen who think their claims on the party for senatorships or even judgeships have not been fully regarded, are heard from, from time to time. Until his victory in his own constituency and in the west generally he was in a sense on probation, both with the party and the public. It had to be established that his policies and leadership were in favour with the electorate before his standing became quite assured. Upon all these points there were no doubts after the general election. The Conservatives were outnumbered in the western parliamentary delegation, and they were weak in personnel. The most active and pertinacious western opposition member was R. L. Richardson who, running as an Independent with Conservative support, had been returned for Lisgar. However, he graced Parliament for but a single session. Having been unseated owing to improper practices by agents, he was decisively defeated by D. A. Stewart, the Liberal nominee, in a lively three-cornered by-election fought in midwinter. The campaign was a series of pitched battles on the platform; for ten successive week-day nights Mr. Sifton and Mr. Richardson fought out their differences face to face in the presence of

the electors. Mr. Sifton explained and defended the government's course with respect to the matters upon which they had been subjected to particular attack by Mr. Richardson—the tariff, the grain act and the policy of assisting railway construction by subsidies. His readiness to step down from the dignified seclusion of his position as cabinet minister to meet Mr. Richardson in a series of meetings in small country halls, made an excellent impression upon the public; and the Lisgar by-election result reduced the insurgent Liberal movement in the west to very small proportions.<sup>1</sup>

One of Mr. Sifton's first problems in the new parliament was to determine what the attitude of the government should be towards the application by the Manitoba Government for Dominion legislation, which was necessary to make effective their bargain with the Canadian Northern railway. The platform of the Manitoba Conservatives in the general election of 1899 called for "the adoption of the principle of government ownership of railways, in so far as the circumstances of the province will permit." In 1901 the Manitoba Conservative government gave effect to this promise, as they claimed, by taking over the Northern Pacific and Manitoba system on a 999 year lease; immediately upon getting possession of the lease they transferred it to the Canadian Northern. The province guaranteed payment of the rental, and further it guaranteed the interest on bonds to the extent of \$20,000 a mile on the line to Port Arthur. In return the railway gave the Manitoba government control over rates, subject to its obligation to pay the deficit if it

<sup>1</sup>Mr. Richardson, however, contrary to expectation, refused to be eliminated from Dominion politics by his defeat. He thereafter stood unsuccessfully for the Dominion parliament in 1904 against Mr. Sifton in Brandon; in 1908, against J. G. Turriff in Assiniboia; and in 1913, in a by-election in Macdonald, Manitoba, when he ran as an Independent Liberal with general Liberal support. In 1917 he was elected to parliament for Springfield as a supporter of the Union Government. In this parliament he was chiefly notable for successfully seconding W. F. Nickle's efforts to stop the granting of titles to Canadians. He died in Winnipeg, Nov. 6, 1921.



reduced rates to the point where they ceased to be productive; and simultaneously with the completion of the arrangement considerable reductions in freight rates were made effective.

This was the "Roblin-Rogers railway deal" which was to be an issue in provincial politics for many years. It imposed a contingent liability upon the province of some \$15,000,000. As the arrangement affected lines outside of the province which were subject to Dominion control, validation of the legislation by the Dominion parliament was necessary. The opposition to the deal, defeated in Manitoba, moved on to Ottawa, demanding that the Dominion withhold its consent; but approval was given after a discussion in which Mr. Sifton took the position, in effect, that this was the business of the province with which the Dominion had no right to interfere. For his refusal to destroy the arrangement, Mr. Sifton was severely criticized by those who were opposed to it; he was accused by some of his more bitter critics of being influenced favourably by a supposed friendship for Mackenzie and Mann. His real attitude is revealed by letters written at this time to various parties in Manitoba—to Isaac Campbell, to A. J. Magurn, editor of the *Free Press*, and others.

There were features of the scheme which he liked—the reduction in rates, and the transfer to a Canadian company of railway lines which had up to that time been controlled from St. Paul. But the financial provisions of the arrangement met with his condemnation. The province, he said, was taking chances which might ruin it. "I think," he said in one of his letters, "it is the most monstrous proposition that I ever heard of." To another correspondent he said this deal was "the legitimate result of the utter madness of people about the railway question." He added: "I have always tried to put on the brakes and go in favour of a reasonable policy, but I have as a rule found very little

co-operation.” But he did not see how the Dominion could control the action of the legislature within the sphere of their jurisdiction in dealing with the finances of the province. “I am amazed that this contract ever went through the House, and still more amazed that there is apparently no disposition on the part of the leading men of the province who are not actively connected with politics to express any condemnation of it.” Mr. Sifton’s refusal to intervene was amply justified by events; for the people of Manitoba, as the next election proved, were in favour of the deal. Saving people from themselves was a Quixotic role which made no appeal to Mr. Sifton’s practical mind.

In keeping with his faith that it was good national business to improve living conditions on the great plains, Mr. Sifton, in the session of 1901, to the great merriment of various members of the opposition, undertook the business of teaching the farmers how to grow trees. He asked for a vote of \$15,000 for tree culture. The idea, as he explained it to the House, was “to institute if possible and in an educative way, a system by which the farmers may know the best kind of trees to plant and how to take care of them. If the experiment is successful and the farmers can be encouraged to go extensively into tree-planting, the result will be worth to the country much more than this small sum of money.” It took thirty columns of *Hansard* to record the gibes of the opposition.<sup>1</sup> The burden of their criticism was that “teaching one’s grandmother to suck eggs” would be a task of necessity in contrast with this absurdity of advising farmers in the matter of tree growing. Mr. Clancy of Bothwell had never heard of anything quite so ridiculous. It was all a deep dark scheme on the part of the Minister to find jobs for some of his hirelings.

However, the Minister, suggesting that perhaps he knew more about the inhabitants of the west than his opposition

<sup>1</sup>*Hansard*, April 9th, 1901.



critics, persisted in his views and got the money. This was the beginning of the tree-planting scheme which has literally changed the face of the prairies. It was built upon the provision of a government nursery, from which seedlings and tree seed in sufficiently large individual lots to enable settlers to establish a shelter-belt, were distributed free to farmers who made application, agreeing to submit themselves in planting and caring for the trees, to the direction of the officials. In 1901 there were 58,000 seedlings supplied to forty-seven farmers. In 1928 Norman H. Ross, who has been with the service from the start and is now its chief, read a paper on Canada's tree planting system to the third British Empire Forestry Conference held in Australia. In that year 7,800,000 seedlings were distributed from two large nurseries, and the total distribution to date was 100,000,000 trees. At the present time the total has reached 116,000,000; and these trees have found rooting and growing places in over 100,000 forms. Behind these shelter belts fruit farming and vegetable farming, difficult if not impossible on the bald prairie, have been developed, thus adding immeasurably to the attractiveness of farm homes. Great oaks from little acorns grow!

## II

The dominant themes in the ninth parliament of Canada were those of tariff and transportation. Nothing much was done with the tariff, but there was endless discussion about it and it supplied the dynamite for one cabinet upheaval: but the government made a bold, if far from successful, attempt to deal comprehensively with the complex transportation problem.

Mr. Sifton's attitude on the tariff as revealed in his letters and speeches was frankly, as previously, one of expediency. He considered the tariff of 1897 as in the nature of a compromise, doing the maximum of benefit and

the minimum of damage to the various Canadian sections and interests; and while he did not regard it as sacrosanct he was not prepared to see it lightly or experimentally modified. In the Lisgar by-election, February 1902, he defended the tariff as it stood against Mr. Richardson's demand that it be cut down; later in the year he was to appear as the champion of the tariff against the remarkable high tariff crusade waged by his colleague, Mr. Israel Tarte.

It was in August, Sir Wilfrid Laurier being absent in England in attendance at the Colonial Conference, that Mr. Tarte, Minister of Public Works began to tell the people of Canada that the tariff, which the government of which he was a member had put in force, must be at once replaced by one highly protectionist in character. The opening blast was given at Midland, Ontario. In this and in a series of meetings held in rapid succession he employed the arguments and used the illustrations which were also the stock-in-trade of the Conservative advocates of high protection. At Midland: "Protection to our manufacturers is a necessity, and we must follow the lead of the Americans with a tariff framed for Canadian purposes." At Halifax, to the Canadian Manufacturers' Association: "There must be ample protection; Canada must have her own factories and her own ships." At Bowmanville: "If I were really the master of the administration, I would first build a system of transportation which would enable the provinces to trade freely with one another, and then I would take the tariff item by item and adjust it so as to save to Canada the profit of the exploitation of her resources, and build up a nation here." At Montreal he talked of his belief in higher protection, which he shared with the Canadian Manufacturers' Association.

And so on day after day, each utterance more picturesque and defiant than the one next preceding it. This was



his way of replying to the private protests which he was daily receiving from his colleagues and to the increasingly sharp comments which were appearing in the Ministerial press. Mr. Tarte was running amuck. The Liberals were flabbergasted; the Conservatives astonished but cheerful. The situation was without precedent.

On September 4th there appeared in the Liberal newspapers an interview with Mr. Sifton in which he said that Mr. Tarte had been expressing his own views not those of the government or the Liberal party. Asked as to his own position he repeated his already well-known views:

"My position is that the tariff as it stands is a compromise, well and carefully worked out. Its adaptability to the requirements of the trade of Canada is shown by results. Manufacturers and consumers alike are getting fair treatment. We would like the tariff lower, but we recognize that there must be mutual concessions, and for the present we recognize the present tariff as a reasonable one. Any attempt to increase the protective features of the tariff in favour of manufacturers as against consumers will meet with the strenuous opposition of every Liberal elected west of Lake Superior.<sup>1</sup> With a trade which was stationary under high protection now growing beyond the most sanguine predictions, and with the western prairies, empty and desolate under Conservative rule, filling up with settlers and increasing their product by millions, we regard the position as extremely satisfactory, and we have certainly no intention of supporting an attempt to saddle ourselves with the discredited Tory policy which kept the country in a state of stagnation for fifteen years. I am satisfied that the great bulk of the Liberal party is sound on the question."

<sup>1</sup>Mr. Sifton, as the representative of the west in the Cabinet said, very truly, that the western Liberals would resist by every means in their power all attempts at raising the tariff. The tariff of 1897 was a compromise between contending interests, but its results speak well for the judgment of its framers. The west has prospered under it. While it would not be accurate to say that it represents the west's tariff ideal, it has been accepted, after some demurring, as a reasonably fair and proper adjustment. But it certainly represents the high-water mark of a revenue tariff, and any attempt to replace it by one still higher would bring about an explosion.—*Manitoba Free Press*, September 5th, 1902.

Speculation as to the reason for Tarte's outbreak was general. He had come into the Liberal party after a lifetime of work for the Conservatives as organizer, advocate and journalist—not on any ground of principle, but because this was the only way of escape from the vengeance of a faction in his party with which he had quarrelled. It was therefore probable that he was in these speeches expressing his real views. But this was hardly a sufficient explanation of his indiscretion; he had up to this time recognized that while he remained in the party he must conform in his public appearances to its views. He certainly did not, at this moment, seek expulsion from the party. The explanation favoured by Dr. Skelton in his *Life of Laurier*, which was widely current at the time, alone appears to supply the key to the mystery. Tarte knew from very private sources, probably from Sir Wilfrid himself, that the indisposition from which the Prime Minister suffered was in reality the onset of a serious illness. It meant, so Mr. Tarte believed, either his death, or his retirement from public life immediately upon his return from England. There was calculation in Mr. Tarte's summer madness. He aimed at nothing less than the leadership of the Liberal party and the Premiership. Quebec would accept him, he believed, in lieu of Laurier; if he could make himself strong in Ontario by identifying himself with the tariff views which he believed were predominant in that province the citadel would be his. Hoping this, and knowing that defeat would mean his disappearance from office, Tarte kept up his campaign, professing all the while his devotion to the Liberal party, until Laurier's ship dropped anchor in the St. Lawrence in mid-October. Laurier, as was evident to all eyes, was a desperately sick man; but he had strength enough to dismiss Tarte out of hand, at the same time reading him a lesson on the elementary proprieties which cabinet ministers should



observe in their relations with their colleagues.<sup>1</sup> Laurier then proceeded south to a health resort, made a tedious but sure recovery and outlived Tarte by many years.

As for Tarte, he went back to his own people, and just a year after his high-protection crusade as a Liberal Minister he went on circuit in Quebec, to test on behalf of his regained friends his strength in his own province against Laurier. The result was disillusionment. He was a broken man and a spent force. In this series of futile speeches in Quebec he credited his ejection from office to the influence of Clifford Sifton. Speaking in Joliette, September 27th, 1903, he said: "Mr. Sifton, the youngest of the Ministers, is the man who is responsible for my retirement from the ministry—Sifton, the man who, from the point of view of the Province of Quebec especially, and of the French-Canadians generally, should never have been allowed to get a seat in the cabinet."<sup>2</sup> He repeated this remark at Portneuf, at Montreal and elsewhere.

Mr. Sifton continued in his public addresses in the west to define his tariff views with frankness. He used exceptionally plain language in speaking to the young Liberals of Winnipeg on January 13th, 1903. In it he recalled his collision with Mr. Tarte who, he said, had taken the field at the instance of interested manufacturers for the purpose of enabling them to exact illegitimate profits. He held, Mr. Sifton said, no doctrinal views on the tariff. Eastern Conservative newspapers were very angry with him because he was a rank free trader. In the west the Conservative newspapers said he was a hide-bound protectionist in disguise. It was the standing grief of his life that he found himself unable to put himself in harmony with both these sets of newspapers. According to the *Winnipeg Telegram* (a

<sup>1</sup>For Laurier's letter of dismissal see Skelton: *Life and Letters of Sir Wilfrid Laurier*, Vol. II, page 182.

<sup>2</sup>Toronto *Globe*, September 28th, 1903.

Conservative newspaper) he was in a conspiracy with the manufacturers to do up the honest farmer. But in fact he was wedded to no hard and fast rule. He believed the tariff should be adjusted from time to time to meet the changing needs of the country, just as a business man would adjust his business methods to meet new conditions. As a general principle he was in favour of low tariffs against higher, but if he saw a legitimate industry suffering through foreign competition, when a slight change of from four to five per cent. would save it from being wiped out, he was not prepared to say he would not consider a case of that kind favourably. Who, whether business man or farmer, would entertain a different view? He would endeavour in any revisions of the tariff to see that it did not become a means of collecting illegitimate profits from the consumer. Speaking at Brandon on January 15th he said that while a certain amount of protection was necessary, the government would keep the tariff as low as possible. Personally, he believed in the principle of "Canada for all the Canadians and not for a few."

In speaking thus to his immediate audience and the west Mr. Sifton may have been preparing the public for a tariff revision which was then being given consideration at Ottawa. At that time the government thought that it would be necessary to overhaul the tariff before going to the people; but the question was pushed to one side by the emergence of the Grand Trunk Pacific issue. But not entirely. In the session of 1904 the device of the dumping duty, which has since been so extensively utilized for the purpose for which it was planned and also for disguised protective purposes, was added to the tariff. Mr. Sifton's letters at this time to his western correspondents, whom he was in the habit of consulting in matters of this kind, indicate that he had a good deal to do with devising the anti-dumping machinery. He was heartily in favour of the principle, which he thus



defined in one of his letters: "Powers, it is proposed, will be taken, in all cases where the Americans dump goods on our market by selling manufactured articles at a price much less than in the home market, to raise the valuation and impose an additional duty so as to make the price equivalent to the price in the home market with the duty added." This seemed to him an unobjectionable method of meeting illegitimate competition.

This correspondence shows also that there was under consideration the change which was made in British preference in 1907, by which Canadian woollens were given additional protection against British competition. This suggestion was linked up, however, in Sifton's mind with the possibility that a duty might be placed on the wool for the assistance of the western sheep-growers. Considerable pressure was being applied to this end by the western woolmen through one of the most influential private members from the west. To the demand for such a duty Sifton replied that it could not be imposed without the whole scale of duties on woollen goods being recast. "I think," he wrote, "that the sheep-raisers are as much entitled to protection as any other portion of the community, and there are a good many reasons which incline me to the opinion that in all probability when the tariff is revised there will be a duty on wool and an increased duty on woollen goods."

In the same letter he said apropos of the impending tariff session: "Speaking on the general question of policy, I think that the whole principle of the revisions of the tariff, so far as our western people are concerned, will have to be changed, and we will find it much more satisfactory to adopt a policy of give and take than a hard and fast policy of resisting increases in the tariff. There are a lot of things which can be improved, but they will have to be improved by dealing with the whole subject in a spirit of compromise."

When the foretold revision took place Mr. Sifton

was not a member of the government. He was never again a party to the making or revising of a tariff. But his attitude towards the question of how it should be made and his belief as to the part tariffs play in the national economy are pretty fully set forth in the records as given in this volume. He was no believer in the principle of *laissez-faire*. He held the view that a government, by conscious and premeditated acts, could change conditions, increase prosperity, readjust the balance between sections and control the national prosperity. He regarded the tariff as an agency to these ends. His business judgment and his experience told him that it could injure as well as help, and that it must therefore be used with moderation and discretion. His judgment as to the height at which the tariff should be fixed to get the best results came into conflict with other judgments—some thought his gauge of prosperity much too high and others not high enough.

These divergences of opinion, which find political expression, are inseparable from any fiscal scheme which employs tariff taxation to control the levels of prosperity and employment. Sifton's judgment as to the point in the scale where the tariff pointer should rest was not in itself constant; we shall see that later it moved to higher levels, and afterwards returned to its original attitude. The tariff influence on trade conditions in Canada is inescapable; and perhaps it can be said that Sifton's cool and balanced judgment as to the extent to which it should be allowed to operate, represents the nearest approach to a workable compromise giving the maximum benefit and the minimum of hardship. He was a believer in a competitive tariff in contrast with the conception of protection as prohibitive. The experience of Canada for fifty years lends support to the opinion that this is the only policy which can command so diversified and general support as to deserve the title "national". Not the least of the losses which Canadian



public life suffered from Mr. Sifton's retirement was the withdrawal of his will and judgment from the pool of opinion in which our tariff schedules were framed.

### III

While Mr. Sifton was in England in 1903 in connection with the Alaskan boundary matter, the Chamberlain tariff agitation began. In May Mr. Chamberlain, as Colonial Secretary, made the speech suggesting the need for mutual preferential tariff arrangements which started the discussion; in midsummer sharpness was added to the controversy by his resignation from the government; and with the delivery of his programme speech in Glasgow in October there began the "raging, tearing campaign" which was to convulse British politics. Mr. Sifton made an early comment upon the movement in May in an address in London to the Canadian Society, and after his return in November he spoke his mind about it in an address to the Canadian Club in Ottawa on December 7th, which attracted wide attention on both sides of the Atlantic. In private letters from London he expressed his distrust of the movement. "Chamberlain's proposals," he wrote to a colleague, "seem to me to be thoroughly impracticable and quite inconsistent with our theory of self-government." He hoped that no Canadian Liberals would commit themselves to these proposals.

The aloofness of the Liberal government of Canada to the Chamberlain movement was a sad blow to its promoters. From its surface appearances an argument could be made, with a considerable degree of plausibility, that it was an effort to meet the proposition fathered by Sir Wilfrid Laurier at the Colonial Conference of 1902; but the Canadian Liberals sensed the political implications of the drive and under their air of complete neutrality there was the wish that it would come to grief, as it did. In the Colonial Conference of 1902, Mr. Chamberlain's interests were centred

on the furthering of plans looking towards political centralization; the fiscal accompaniment of such a movement was free trade within the Empire, for which he had words of approval. The Conference proceedings were a real if somewhat disguised tug-of-war between Chamberlain and Laurier. The Canadian Prime Minister wanted no council of the Empire and no scheme of Imperial Free Trade; and he countered with a suggestion that the principle of mutual preference should be extended by the free action of the component parts of the Empire. A resolution asked Great Britain to reciprocate the advantages extended to British goods by the Colonies by granting a preference on colonial products, "by exemption from or reduction of duties now or hereafter imposed". Mr. Chamberlain in the discussion spoke disparagingly of the preference granted by Canada on British goods; and expressed doubts as to whether any apparent extension of the preference would add much to its value. Mr. Chamberlain's criticism of the preferences granted Great Britain by the overseas British nations is still very much to the point. "So long as a preferential tariff—even a munificent preference—is still sufficiently protective to exclude us altogether, or very nearly so, from your markets, it is no satisfaction to us that you have imposed even greater disability upon the same goods if they come from foreign markets." It would be impossible, he said, for Great Britain to repay the Colonies for their preferences in the manner suggested unless the colonies were prepared to go much farther, opening their home markets to British goods on terms of greater equality.

Mr. Chamberlain, finding the road to political consolidation thus blockaded, came to the conclusion, after studying the situation, that the defensive position of the colonies (or perhaps it would be more accurate to say "of Canada") could be outflanked by formulating and carrying out a policy of extensive mutual preference which, once in force,



would make, as he believed, political consolidation inevitable. From the beginning there were certain assumptions in the advocacy of the Chamberlain scheme which were relied upon to make the political appeal irresistible. The Colonies, Canada especially, demanded preference and were prepared, if it were given, to pay handsomely for it; if Great Britain refused to listen to this demand the Empire was doomed, and Great Britain would sink to the level of a second or third-class power.

Skilfully or crudely, with deft suggestiveness or brazen assurance, this view was put out in Great Britain by pamphlets, by private canvass, by newspaper propaganda, by platform advocacy. Canada bulked very large in the discussion. Much of the controversy turned on two questions: "Did Canada demand a preference from Great Britain?"; "Was Canada willing to make further concessions if a British preference were granted?" If official affirmative answers had been given to these questions it is not probable that it would have affected the result; the people of Great Britain at that time were not prepared to tax their food no matter how strong the appeal. In the face of the refusal of the Canadian Government to help on the drive by supplying the desired avowals, there was no lack of private assurances that Canada wanted a preference, demanded a preference, would not be happy without one, and in her grief and resentment in the case of denial might enter into trade relations with other lands that would forever bar an Imperial trade arrangement.

The Empire, it was declared, was at the parting of the ways. That gallant warrior Colonel G. T. Denison, President of the British Empire League in Canada, wrote to the *Times* to assure the people of Great Britain that with the exception of one or two renegade Canadians the country was solidly in favour of Mr. Chamberlain and his scheme. The British opponents of Mr. Chamberlain who said that

Canada was not favourable to his proposition, showed a lack of honesty which was shocking to Colonel Denison: it unsettled his faith in the "honour and truthfulness and manly straightforwardness of English gentlemen". "Why should these gentlemen", he asked of the *Times*, "work so hard against our Empire?"<sup>1</sup> George E. Foster toured England to let the people know about the demands of the colonies. "They now came to England as the dominant power, and asked for her action and voice in the matter (of granting a British preference upon Colonial products, which necessitated the abandonment of free trade). That was the policy which the colonies wished to see adopted. That was the question which the Colonies were asking England to answer. . . . The Mother country must heed the voice of the Colonies and join hands with them."<sup>2</sup>

The position of the Canadian government throughout the whole controversy was one of remoteness from the battle. They would not put themselves or the country for which they spoke in the position of even seeming to apply pressure to affect the decision of the British people, upon a question which was their own concern. Speaking to the Canadian Society of London in May, 1903, at the very beginning of the controversy, Mr. Sifton said that a question had been raised by the Colonial Secretary which the people of Great Britain must decide for themselves; until this decision was reached it was not in order that anything further should be heard from Canada. The position of Canada was or should be well-known. Canada as a part of her fiscal policy had given Great Britain a preference; and if Great Britain, in the exercise of her judgment as a part of her fiscal policy, thought it would be for her benefit to give Canada a return preference, it would be thankfully accepted.

<sup>1</sup>London *Times*, December 26th, 1903.

<sup>2</sup>From a speech at Oldham, December 23rd, 1903, reported in the Oldham *Evening Chronicle* of December 24th.



Canada had never sought to exact as the price of her preference a return preference by Great Britain. There was no desire to intrude Canadian opinion upon the domestic concerns of Britain. In December, in Ottawa, the Chamberlain proposition in the interval having taken definite form, he spoke with more emphasis and directness.

Mr. Chamberlain, in his programme speech in Glasgow in October, had explained what Great Britain upon his recommendation would do, and the return which was expected from the Colonies. Mr. Chamberlain saw impending ruin for Great Britain if his proposals were not acted upon with promptitude. "I see signs of decay: I see cracks and crevices in the wall of the great structure; I know that the foundations upon which it has been raised are not broad enough or deep enough to maintain it." (Loud cheers). In contrast he offered them his alternative: "the creation of an Empire such as the world has never seen." His proposition was that Great Britain should put a tax of two shillings a quarter upon wheat; a small tax of about five per cent. on dairy and meat products (bacon excepted). From these taxes Empire-grown produce would be excepted; and in addition a substantial preference upon Colonial wines and perhaps on Colonial fruits would be given. "The colonies are prepared to meet us. In return for a very moderate preference they will give us a substantial advantage. They will reserve to us the trade which we already enjoy. They will arrange for tariffs in the future not to start industries in competition with those which are already in existence in the mother country." The need for action was stressed. "This is the parting of the ways. If you do not take it, it will not recur."<sup>1</sup>

To all this Mr. Sifton expressed his dissent in his Ottawa speech. If Great Britain accepted the proposals of the Colonial Conference a bargain could be struck; but it was

<sup>1</sup>London *Times*, October 7th, 1903.

for the people of Great Britain to decide whether or not to adhere to free trade. A duty by Great Britain on grain, with preference on Empire wheat, would benefit Canada; it would stimulate production and enhance the price to a certain extent. Something would have to be given in return. No one would seriously ask a preference from Britain without giving a return. "Until there is a decision by the British electorate, and until the government has been elected to deal with it, and until we find what they are going to ask us to do, we do not know whether we will be able to meet their wishes or not." No one in Canada, however, would agree with the proposal that Canada should not start any new industries to compete with British manufacturers.

He objected to the light in which Canada was being put in the discussion in Great Britain. "I oppose", said Mr. Sifton, "Canada being represented in Britain as a squalling infant crying for something it must have; crying out for preferential trade, and threatening to join the American union if they were not granted it." He had carefully refrained from taking any part in the discussion in Great Britain, but he had taken occasion to say that Canada was not correctly represented when it was stated that she required to be bribed in order to secure her loyalty to the British Empire. That observation he repeated with emphasis. Canadians were not in the position of asking alms or assistance of any kind. "I cannot imagine anything that would be more destructive to the self-respect or the self-reliance of Canadians than such a condition of affairs. I think that in making a trade arrangement with Britain we should be prepared to give as much as we get; if we are not prepared to do so I am opposed to any treaty that is not mutually advantageous to both. When the time comes we will say that we are not children, but grown up, and that we will assume the responsibilities as well; we will ask nothing for which we are not prepared to give a fair equivalent."



These passages in the speech were cabled to Great Britain and became at once material for the fiscal controversy. They were not hailed with enthusiasm by the Chamberlainite Press; but the journals critical of this development saw in them the effective protest of a self-respecting country.<sup>1</sup> Lord Rosebery, speaking five days later, used the speech as an illustration supporting his contention that Great Britain was not under pressure from the colonies. Said Lord Rosebery:

“We were rejoicing in the strength and unity of the Empire as displayed in the South African war, until that fateful day last May, when we were assured on the highest departmental authority that the British Empire was only a pack of cards, unless it was propped up by Protection. Happily, however, we have discovered that this declaration rested on a misconception. We have found that the offer from the Colonies which, if we neglected we should lose those colonies, was a delusion, unfounded on any substratum of fact. We have found that the statement that the Empire could only be kept together by preferential tariffs is denied by every particle of evidence which comes from those colonies, and which is entitled to weight. Only two days ago Mr. Sifton, one of the Canadian Ministers, declared with indignation that Canada did not require to be bribed into loyalty. That sentence, as I believe, will be re-echoed in every part of our English speaking Empire.”

In Canada, Mr. Sifton's remarks accelerated the recession of the feeling favourable to the Chamberlain scheme which was already taking place. There was a notable cooling off in the enthusiasm of the protectionist Canadian manufacturers after Mr. Chamberlain's Glasgow speech. The

<sup>1</sup>So far as Mr. Sifton opposed any scheme for welding the commerce of the Empire he did it on grounds, consonant with Canadian dignity, that Canada was neither in the position of a beggar asking for aid and unable to give a return nor of a naughty child who would rebel if it were not given what it wanted. There is both manliness and sense in the view, and we cannot but look on it as mistaken patriotism to show touchiness at the freer criticism of men of Mr. Sifton's rather assertive candour.—*Saturday Review*, December 12th 1903.

Canadian farmers declined to identify themselves in sentiment with a movement which might increase the cost of living to the British poor. The Canadians who were displeased with Mr. Sifton's position were those who desired the political consolidation of the Empire, and regarded the Chamberlain scheme as a means to that end. There were other statements by Mr. Sifton in this speech that added to this displeasure. He was, he said, unalterably opposed to Imperial Federation if it meant that the business of the Empire was to be transacted by one parliament in London; Canada would not give up any part of its autonomy.

Upon the question of naval protection for Canada he was still more unorthodox. Canada needed protection by land, and to that end he suggested military service on the Swiss model; but "it was a fallacy to suppose that Britain's navy was necessary to protect Canada's external commerce." It was those who wanted our exports that had to protect them. He answered the argument then (and still) in common use, that the British tax-payer was taxed to maintain a navy for the defence of Canada, by repeating a statement by Sir Charles Tupper that, if Canada did not exist Great Britain's navy would be as large as it then was.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Sifton's speech, which also included the reference to treaty-making powers already noted, was a thorough-going nationalist deliverance, the first of many that he was to contribute to the discussion of Imperial relations.

#### IV

Canada, coming into the new century with agricultural production rising like a tide, population increasing, and trade expanding, became acutely conscious that her transportation facilities were falling behind her needs; and confirmation was given to this belief by railway blockades which affected all Canada in the autumn of both 1901 and 1902, and were

<sup>1</sup>*Manitoba Free Press*, December 8th, 1903.



especially acute in western Canada, where farmers could not get cars with which to ship their wheat. A phrase attributed to Sir William Van Horne, "the hopper is too big for the spout," described the situation as the public saw it, with epigrammatic force. A reference by Sir Wilfrid Laurier in a public address to the need of additional railway outlets for the country's trade, elicited an amount of approving comment which showed how public opinion was forming. Working out programmes of new railway construction became a favourite occupation of public men on both sides of Parliament; and there were about as many solutions of the railway problem as there were programmes.

In the autumn of 1902 the first definite proposal emerged. The Grand Trunk Railway Company, the pioneer railway of Canada, stepped into the field with an offer. That railway, which for decades had been benumbed by the soporific effects of remote control, was awaking to the realities and opportunities of the situation under the leadership of a new and vigorous manager, Charles M. Hays, an American; and with this re-birth of enterprise George A. Cox, the biggest figure in the relatively restricted Canadian financial world of that time, became associated with the company. It seemed obvious to them, looking to the future, that the railway must get into the Canadian west, the field of greatest prospective development. In November, 1902, the Grand Trunk offered to build a second transcontinental line from North Bay to the Pacific coast, for a land subsidy of 5,000 acres a mile and a cash subsidy of \$6,000 a mile. With this definite proposal, highly agreeable to public opinion, of another transcontinental road, which it was believed would open up new avenues of prosperity, the government was faced with the necessity of preparing a workable scheme for submission to the electors at the forthcoming election.

The Grand Trunk proposition raised some questions which had to be answered. The suggestion of a land grant was out of date and was denied consideration. But the government had to decide whether it would deal exclusively with the Grand Trunk in supplying itself with the needed new transcontinental; and if it did make this choice was the route suggested the right one? The last question was decided with some promptitude. The proposition of the Grand Trunk meant that its share of the business of western Canada destined for export would be carried to the railway's eastern terminal at Portland, Maine. This was wholly unacceptable. The government had the vision, even if vaguely, of additional transportation facilities carrying Canadian trade to Canadian ports, and thence overseas in fast Canadian boats. A transcontinental railway must be built that would serve these purposes; and with this as the recognized goal the ministers, in the winter months of 1902 and 1903, plunged into the task of preparing a suitable scheme.

In the working out of the plan that was finally adopted Mr. Sifton played a very slight part. The binding decisions were made when he was in England, immersed in the task of preparing for the Alaskan boundary hearing; and he returned to Canada at the end of June, 1903, to accept and loyally support the solution which had been reached by his colleagues. That the scheme finally adopted was far removed from his idea of the proper solution is revealed very clearly in his letters and private papers. Two of these letters may be particularly referred to; they reveal clearly his attitude towards the question of providing Canadian trade for Canadian ports, and the means by which he proposed to give effect to his wishes in this respect. In December, 1902, Mr. Charles Fitzpatrick, Minister of Justice, wrote him asking for his views upon a proposal that the coasting laws should be relaxed, for the purpose of enabling



vessels of American registry to carry Canadian grain—i.e. between Canadian ports. To this request Sifton declared himself “unalterably opposed” for these reasons:

“We have never had a lake marine of any magnitude having Canadian register. The reason has been two-fold; first, not a sufficient east-bound traffic; second, hardly any west-bound traffic. We are now in a position to furnish in rapidly increasing volume an east-bound traffic. The west-bound traffic will still for some years be small, but the volume of business is now large enough to justify the building of ships and the registering of them as Canadian bottoms. In my judgment it would be a fatal mistake at this moment to resign the advantages of our position, and I am in favour of a thorough-going protective policy upon this point. I would favour the Government spending any sum of money, or pledging its credit to any extent necessary, to place upon the lakes a Canadian marine fit to carry our grain between Canadian ports. The business would only be profitable for three months in the year. The return cargoes at first would be small, but if a loss of interest occurred I think the Government could afford to stand the loss, provided this scheme be combined with other arrangements which will result in every bushel of the grain which is handled by these vessels going to Europe from Canadian ports.”

He enlarged the letter to expound his views generally upon the transportation problem. He had had, from the beginning of his service as a minister, a vision of a transportation system whereby the products of the labours of the western agriculturists would be carried to the seaboard, through exclusively Canadian channels and shipped from Canadian ports. He lamented that six years had passed and nothing worth while had been done. There ought to be an expert investigation to determine, among other things, these facts: the hauling power of every eastern Canadian railroad; the cost price of hauling; the nature of the ocean tonnage facilities that can be furnished at each port; the causes which lead to that tonnage being abundant or otherwise; the methods that must be adopted to attract tonnage, to keep

the ocean rates sufficiently low to enable Canadian ports to compete with Boston, Portland, New York and Baltimore. Whatever was necessary to do to attain these ends he would do.

"If it became necessary to extend the government system of railways to Georgian Bay, I would do so. If it became necessary to construct the French River canal, which is well worthy of consideration, I would do that. In fact, whatever was necessary to accomplish the purpose I would do, because the purpose must be accomplished if the commercial life of Canada is to be preserved, and we are to derive as a country the benefits which we have a right to expect from the successful operations which are going on in the west at the present time."

The quoted passages reveal most clearly the dominating purpose in Mr. Sifton's mind. It was to make Canada a thriving, prosperous country; to keep trade to Canadian channels; to control external trade through Canadian sea-ports; and to carry Canadian products abroad in Canadian ships. This was a programme of thorough-going economic nationalism. He was too clear-headed and too well-informed in matters of trade and commerce not to know that it was the "pull" of the United States exercised in a thousand ways, which would make the carrying out of these policies difficult. He knew quite well that the shorter haul to the United States ports, and the greater availability of tonnage at these ports due to larger volumes of trade, gave them immense attractiveness to Canadian shippers and Canadian carriers; but he would not admit that the fight was hopeless. Given the necessary public backing the Canadian channels of transportation could be established.

These ends could be greatly served in his opinion by the right solution of the railway problem. What the right solution was, in his opinion, was outlined with some care in a memorandum which he left behind for the consideration of Sir Wilfrid, when he left for England in March 1903. He



proposed that a division of the territory to be served should be made between the Canadian Northern and the Grand Trunk:

"The conclusion at which I have arrived is that a proposition should be made to the Grand Trunk and the Canadian Northern to come to terms on the following general lines:—That the Grand Trunk should undertake the building of a line from Quebec to Port Arthur; that the Canadian Northern should take the territory from Port Arthur, and complete the line to Port Simpson or other points on the Pacific; and that a perpetual traffic contract should be made between the two lines which would insure the Grand Trunk getting all the business of the Canadian Northern from the West, and would insure the Canadian Northern getting all the business of the Grand Trunk from the East. The more I have thought of this scheme the more reasonable it seems to me from every standpoint."

The Grand Trunk would be given direct public assistance from Quebec to Port Arthur; the Canadian Northern would be similarly helped to extend its prairie system through the mountains to the Pacific coast. Other assistance, if required, could take the form of a guarantee of bonds. The Grand Trunk could supply the needed steamship service on the Atlantic; the Canadian Northern would do likewise on the Pacific, when the need arose. The arrangement would be extremely advantageous to the public and to the railways themselves. The Grand Trunk, by a traffic arrangement with the Canadian Northern, would get far more western business than would be possible by building its own lines. The division of management due to the country being divided between two companies would be to the public advantage. Such an arrangement would supply "the best possible route to the sea-board for the grain of the north-west when the lake navigation closed during the winter months,"—further proof that in Sifton's mind the construction of a new transcontinental road implied a con-

tinued outward flow of grain from the Canadian west over Canadian roads to Canadian ports during the winter months.

He realized that there might be difficulties in carrying out this plan. There was for instance, "the sentimental ambition of the Grand Trunk people to own a transcontinental line." But objections should be over-ruled. "My own view is that they should be required to come to this arrangement." Such a plan with a railway commission—the creation of the railway commission was part of the legislative programme of the government at that time—for the control of rates superadded, would commend itself to the common sense and judgment of the community.

Looking back it can be seen that this was much the most practical suggestion made for dealing with the problem. This perhaps was the only plan in which there was even a chance of success. Sir Wilfrid, it is known, desired co-operation between the two systems, either by a merger or by a traffic agreement; and strove to bring it about by conferences between the principals, in some of which he took a direct part. In these conferences it was found that it was not only the Grand Trunk which was consumed with an ambition to have its own transcontinental system; Mr. Mackenzie and Mr. Mann, the promoters of the Canadian Northern, also had their dreams and their vanities. The companies were not "required" to come together as Sifton had suggested; and the government turned to the Grand Trunk, making with that company the arrangement which was subsequently submitted to parliament and to the country.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of having an all-Canadian road was

<sup>1</sup>The old road, proud of its four hundred millions of debt, despised the upstart; the new, conscious of towering ambitions and local influence and knowledge, underrated the old. Common ground could not be found voluntarily, and neither government nor opposition could see far enough into the extravagant rivalry and duplications, the subsidies, guarantees, lobbying of the future to urge compulsion. Skelton: *Life and Letters of Sir Wilfrid Laurier*, Vol. II, page 194.



attained—as it was thought—by the Dominion undertaking to build a publicly-owned road from Winnipeg to Moncton; and this was to be leased to the contracting company, the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway Company, the rentals being remitted for seven years. The privately-owned road from Winnipeg to the Pacific was to be built on the credit of the parent company; and as a subvention the Dominion was to pay the interest on the bonds upon the mountain section for seven years. The government thought that it was obtaining a second transcontinental line from the Pacific to a point on the Intercolonial in New Brunswick at the cost of seven years' interest on the construction cost of two sections of the road—a mere bagatelle of some fifteen million dollars.

It does not come within the scope of this work to tell the story of the tragic failure of these hopes. But looking back it can be seen that the factor which chiefly made for the disaster was the continued existence and expansion (with public encouragement) of the Canadian Northern railway. If it had been merged with the Grand Trunk Pacific the single corporation might have established itself, even in the face of the depression which set in some eight years later and the stresses of the war. But with the Canadian Northern left free to pursue its transcontinental ambitions, the Canadian parliament obligingly voting bond guarantees for the construction of lines paralleling the Grand Trunk Pacific within gun-shot, the crash was inevitable.

Mr. Sifton, returning from London at the end of June to attend for a brief period to his parliamentary duties, found the arrangement with the Grand Trunk virtually completed, and albeit with reluctances and doubts well-known to his friends, accepted his share of collective responsibility for the arrangement.<sup>1</sup> His speech in its support was one of the

<sup>1</sup>The writer has only too clear a remembrance of the terms in which a facetious friend, who strongly favoured the arrangement with the Grand Trunk, explained Sifton's acceptance of the situation. "Sifton", he said, "has sufficient perspicacity to be able to distinguish between a hearse and a band waggon." But it is pretty clear that Sifton had his doubts about the vehicles.

most effective made in parliament; and in the election campaign of 1904 there was no suggestion of doubt, in his public speeches, of the success of the venture. More than twenty years later, by the help of such agencies as were at his disposal, he earnestly supported the attempt to have low rates on Western grain fixed to Quebec and onward to the ports of the Maritime provinces—an attempt to give effect at that late date to the purposes he had in mind when he backed the proposition of a second transcontinental system.

## V

Perhaps there never was a time when satisfaction with existing conditions and confidence in the future were so general in Canada as in the year 1904. There was hardly a cloud in the sky. The government could point to a financial record with a surplus for the current year of more than fifteen million dollars. All the indices of business activity, railway earnings, banking returns, rate of wages, numbers employed were favourable. In the preceding year 57,000 homesteaders had been successfully placed. In the same year 130,000 people came into Western Canada; and this immigration was absorbed by the country without any local congestion anywhere of unemployed. The complaint was indeed about a continuing shortage of labour. The Canadian Pacific announced that it had been unable fully to carry out its construction plans in 1903 because, though it had made unremitting efforts to get labour, it had not been successful. A demand for labour which it would be impossible completely to fill would, it was expected, go on for years. The prediction that a prosperous and expanding west would mean national prosperity was being fulfilled to the letter. In the election campaign of 1904 the government's claim that it had induced the prosperity which abounded was countered by Mr. Foster with a statement, made in Toronto, that the government was not entitled to



credit because it was the great west that was making Canada prosperous. This gave Mr. Sifton an opening for an effective retort: "Well, perhaps it is the west that is making the country prosperous," he said at Winnipeg, "but the west was here from 1885 to 1896 without the country being prosperous."

With these conditions and the hope of still better times from the building of the Grand Trunk Pacific, there was such a rallying of public support to the government that the general election of November 3rd hardly took on the appearance of a contest. In theory there was a formidable line-up against the government. The Canadian Pacific railway did not relish the prospect of additional competition; Messrs. Mackenzie and Mann were so angry at the preference shown the Grand Trunk that they entered into a conspiracy, having all the characteristics of *opera bouffe*, to destroy the Liberal strength in Quebec. The Dundonald incident had given the ultra-loyalists in Ontario a pretext for waving the "old flag";<sup>1</sup> the government had suffered the secession of two outstanding members, Mr. Israel Tarte, Minister of Public Works, and Mr. A. G. Blair, Minister of Railways. None of these things counted. Through the operation of an electoral system, which in parliamentary representation exaggerates popular strength, the Laurier government carried two-thirds of the constituencies. In the west the Liberal percentage was still higher, only one seat in four going Conservative. Mr. Sifton had an easy victory in Brandon over R. L. Richardson, and he returned to Ottawa with six Liberal colleagues from Manitoba.

<sup>1</sup>Lord Dundonald, General Officer Commanding the Canadian forces was summarily dismissed in June 1904 for having, upon a public occasion, criticized the Minister of Militia and the policies of the government. This, in Sir Wilfrid's judgment, was an "unpardonable indiscretion". Before departing for England Lord Dundonald carried on a brisk campaign against the government, urging the people to "keep both hands on the Union Jack". He was the last officer from the Imperial Army to hold the position of General Officer Commanding the Canadian forces.

In July, 1904, the Winnipeg exhibition, by virtue of grants and special exhibits, became the Dominion exhibition of the year. Upon the occasion of the opening the speech of the day was delivered by Mr. Sifton. Some of this address may here be fittingly quoted, as illustrative of his opinion not only as to the position which western Canada had achieved, but as to the future which he saw before it. He spoke of existing conditions on the prairies—thriving cities, an increasing population intent upon taking from the soil the wealth which nature had liberally bestowed. He continued:

“What do we expect this great west to accomplish for itself and for its people? We know now that there is no place known to civilization, where the poor man with willing and strong hands, and a mind disposed to success, may find a more certain reward for his labour; where he is more assured by reasonable diligence and frugality of social advancement and prosperity to himself and his family. And we know that the home-seekers of the world, at present, are aware of this fact, and are coming to cast their destinies amongst us. And therefore, sir, we look in the near future to see upon these western plains, and in this western province and territories, a great population; great not only in numbers, but in other respects; not depressed by poverty, but a population characterized in its social conditions by a high degree of comfort and prosperity.

“We look forward to other things. We look forward to the production of natural wealth of all kinds. In this great country we expect to see the wealth of the field, of the forest and of the mine exploited in vast quantities, furnishing remunerative occupation to large numbers of our people. We expect to see cities and towns springing up, in which the comforts and refinements of civilization will be within the reach of all. We expect to see a creditable system of education amongst our people, in which intellectual advancement and intellectual culture will go hand in hand with material progress.

“We expect another thing. We know that we have shown to the world that a western community is not necessarily a lawless community. But we hope to exhibit a great



community, great in numbers and prosperity, built up within a single generation, in which respect for life and property is as profound, in which administration of the law is as good as it is in the oldest and best organized communities of the world. We desire, in the end, that the accumulation of wealth and the observance of social obligations shall not exhaust the energies of our people, but that our educational system may be crowned by institutions of learning; that culture may not be forgotten, that the arts and sciences may not be neglected; so that Canadians may not fail in their duties to civilization.

"I have to say a word as to what we expect western Canada will do for itself. But it will not be enough that it shall do only for itself. It is a portion of Canada. Canada is a national entity. Canada is an organism, and you cannot develop a single part of an organism satisfactorily. Each and all parts must contribute to the vitality of the whole. What then will western Canada do for the Canadian organism? Sir, it will give a vast and profitable traffic to its railways and steamship lines. It will give remunerative employment to tens of thousands of men, to keep the permanent way in order, to man the trains and ships, and to engage in the multitude of occupation which gather around the great system of transportation. It will do more. It will build up our Canadian seaports. It will create a volume of ocean traffic which shall place Canada in a short time in its proper position as a maritime nation. It will furnish a steady and remunerative business to the manufacturers of eastern Canada, giving assured prosperity where uncertainty now exists. These are things which the west will do for the east. In a word, I may say it will send a flood of new blood from one end of this great country to the other, through every artery of commerce.

"We know what the Canadian of the past is; but what the Canadian of the twentieth century shall be depends upon the men of this generation. Let us determine that we shall proceed with vigour and unflinching courage in the projects of national development, remembering that upon the strength and labour, the patriotism and courage of the individual, the national prosperity of the whole country depends. It is a labour that is worthy of us. It is a labour worthy of a young people. We cannot look into the future; we cannot foresee the destiny of Canada; but, sir, on this we rest well assured: that Canada has not been led through

the perils and difficulties of its chequered career, that six million people have not been placed in command of the northern half of this continent with all its vast resources, that we shall occupy an ignoble and insignificant position amongst the nations of the earth. Rather, sir, we are led irresistibly to the conclusion that as time goes on it will be made increasingly evident that this young nation has a destiny and mission among the peoples of the earth which will redound to the honour and credit of our race."

The experienced political observer if asked in the closing days of 1904 to express his views as to the Liberal party's future, would without doubt have said that there was no data available upon which any forecast of the setting in of decay in its power could be based. Laurier was at the summit of his power and authority; he was still, at sixty-three, relatively young; he had at least two younger associates fitted, in popular estimation, to carry on the leadership—Fielding and Sifton. Probably if pressed for an opinion as to the political futures of these two men, the experienced political observer would have picked Clifford Sifton as Laurier's successor, partly on account of his youth but chiefly because of the reputation he had built up in his eight years in the government, for business ability and political sagacity. His one handicap was his increasing physical disability—deafness. If any one had predicted in November 1904, that in just four months time there would be at Ottawa something very like a political crisis, arising from Clifford Sifton's retirement from the government owing to a disagreement with Laurier over policy, his prophecy would have been greeted with incredulous laughter. But in politics there is nothing static, nor can its development be charted by the wisest seers.

Great as was his physical strength, and limitless as his nervous energy appeared to be, Mr. Sifton invariably overtaxed them in a political campaign; and after the triumph of 1904, as previously, he found it necessary to take a rest.



Early in the year he departed for the southern states on a holiday. Apparently there was no reason why he should not take things easy—there was not a cloud in the political sky. Late in February he received a letter from Ottawa which filled him with apprehension; he started for Ottawa immediately; on the way he received information that what he feared had happened; and he reached Ottawa resolute in his determination to retire from the government. Which resolution he proceeded forthwith to put into effect.

## CHAPTER TEN

### THE NORTH-WEST SCHOOL QUESTION: RETIREMENT FROM OFFICE

Politics are not a drama where scenes follow one another according to a methodical plan, where the actors exchange forms of speech, settled beforehand; politics are a conflict of which chance is incessantly modifying the whole course.—*Sorel*.

#### I

IT was a matter of general knowledge and common observation that when the time came to erect the territories into provinces the government would find itself in trouble. This explained the particular interest in this matter displayed by the opposition in the ninth parliament. In the session of 1903 the Conservatives urged in parliament the immediate enfranchisement of the Territories; this the government met by agreeing that the time was approaching when this question would have to be dealt with. Thereafter newspapers that had no objection to troubling the waters for the government, began to indulge in speculations as to what would be done about the schools when the Territories were given the status of provinces. From Quebec came intimation that the educational rights of the minority must be carefully protected; from Ontario, foreboding that the Laurier government would “shackle” the provinces by limiting their freedom to deal with education. An effort to make this an issue in the elections of 1904 was made in Ontario; but it failed before the Fabian tactics of the government. But it was in the minds of the ministers, especially those directly concerned—the Prime Minister and the Minister of the



Interior—that, in the event of victory, they would have to deal promptly with the question in the new parliament. Following the election the matter was taken up with a view to an early decision.

Laurier, with his knowledge of the circumstances and his political foresight and alertness, did not, in February 1905, walk with unseeing eyes into the crisis over the north-west schools. He knew precisely what he was about, and the ends he hoped to attain; and he calculated, doubtless with care, the effective means to the attainment of these ends. He sadly erred in his calculation because he overestimated his ability to induce Sifton to lie in the bed he had prepared for him; after all his years of association with him, Laurier had no proper understanding of the strength of Sifton's will nor the tenacity of his views. When the storm broke and the party faced disaster there was a free expression of opinion within the party about the ineptitude of Laurier's handling of the matter; it seemed impossible to believe that he could commit the blunder of going ahead in a matter in which Sifton was directly and vitally interested, in Sifton's absence, without first ascertaining his views and desires. Laurier went ahead, it is true, in Sifton's absence—not, however, in ignorance of his views, but because he knew what his views were.<sup>1</sup> Laurier's course was not a blunder, a word which suggests thoughtless stupidity: it was a carefully thought out bit of strategy which misfired because intangible elements entered into the operation which he did not accurately appraise.

Mr. Sifton, in speaking confidentially to his intimates about his cabinet associates and his experiences, commented now and then upon Laurier's growing inclination to settle questions about which there was disagreement by reaching

<sup>1</sup>For statements of moment made in this chapter for which no authority is given the reader will be justified in assuming that they are made on the strength of statements made to the writer by Sir Clifford himself.

a decision, and giving effect to it, in a way which left his colleagues face to face with the accomplished fact. Laurier delivered these strokes deftly and with as much consideration as was possible, consistent with him having his own way; and he counted upon the affection and regard in which he was held by all his colleagues, and his own unrivalled ability to smooth down ruffled feathers, to head off trouble. Mr. Sifton had had this experience several times: in matters of high policy like the Alaskan boundary, where Laurier surrendered the Canadian contention as to the composition of the tribunal, to his engagement; in lesser matters of more direct personal concern, as in the case of filling the portfolio of Justice when Honourable David Mills was appointed to the bench early in 1902. When this vacancy was in prospect Mr. Sifton submitted his qualifications for the position to Sir Wilfrid. He was desirous of getting the position for reasons which he did not disguise to himself, to Sir Wilfrid, nor to his immediate friends with whom he discussed his plans. He had been for two elections in Manitoba the "practical politician" of the administration of which he was a member; and in one Dominion election he had played the same role in western Canada. Mr. Sifton was tired of the role and of the demands upon his time, energy and temper which it made; nor was he indifferent to the fact that the popular idea of political management put it and its practitioners on a low plane.

Mr. Sifton put his case frankly to Sir Wilfrid; and said that if in his judgment his qualifications fitted him for the position, he desired it as a promotion. As his more intimate friends knew, it was his intention, had he been appointed Minister of Justice, to withdraw from the active conduct of political affairs, and devote himself to the impartial discharge of the duties of that high office. About that time Mr. Sifton departed for Manitoba to take part in the Lisgar by-election, in the firm belief that the chieftain had looked



with favour upon his suggestion and that, upon his return to Ottawa, the question which had been left open would be dealt with to his satisfaction. In the midst of his by-election activities Mr. Sifton got the news that Mr. Charles Fitzpatrick, the Solicitor-General, had been appointed Minister of Justice. Upon returning to Ottawa an explanation was asked; but all that was offered by Sir Wilfrid was an expression of regret, with an observation that no other course had been open to him. It was the recollection of occurrences like this that moved Mr. Sifton to say, almost on the eve of the event, that some day he would be presented with an accomplished fact to which he would refuse to bow.

Following the election of November 1904, and before Mr. Sifton departed for the southern states early in the new year, there was some discussion among the members of the government as to the policy which was to be followed in dealing with the territories. All were agreed that the territories should be divided into two provinces. Earlier, Mr. Sifton had been well disposed towards the suggestions that Manitoba's boundary should be extended westward, and the rest of the territories erected into one province; but he recognized that the proposition, if there ever was life in it, did not survive the joint debate about it between Mr. Haultain, the territorial Premier and Mr. Roblin the Premier of Manitoba, in 1901.<sup>1</sup> The arrangements as to lands, subsidies, etc., subsequently incorporated in the autonomy bills, which embodied in the main Sifton's views, were considered and approved. There was also discussion about the school clauses that should be incorporated in the provincial constitutions; and Mr. Sifton left for the South believing that he had made his position perfectly clear.

<sup>1</sup>The debate took place at Indian Head on December 18th, 1901. It resulted in an almost unanimous manifestation of territorial opinion adverse to annexation. Mr. Haultain, however, held out the prospect of a single great province, which in time would be the greatest in Canada. Then, as later, he was opposed to the division of the territories.

His position in relation to this question was one of difficulty. He knew that he could not square his attitude in Manitoba in 1896 with any solution of the territorial problem that was politically possible at Ottawa in 1905; but he was prepared to accept the inconsistency, and offer a defence for it which should rest not only upon political reality but upon a real variation in circumstances. In 1896 Manitoba was free from all legal limitations upon her power to deal with education; and the position of the Manitoba government which Mr. Sifton defended was that it would not consent to public moneys being voted for the support of sectarian schools. But the territories had had for thirty years a dual system of schools, established by law; and in view of the principle embodied both in the British North America Act and in the Manitoba Act, that educational rights legally enjoyed before Confederation must survive Confederation, there was a very strong case—strong in equity, in constitutional practice and in political necessity—for the recognition in the new provincial constitutions of the existing educational rights of the minority.

Mr. Sifton knew only too well the counter-argument that would be advanced: that the new provinces ought to be left free to decide their own educational policies. His feelings and the slant of his mind on these questions made him extremely sympathetic to this view of the question; but his judgment instructed him that he could not support it. It was only after wrestling with himself that he said, perhaps to all his colleagues in council but certainly to Laurier, that although he realized that he left himself open to an attack that would be bound to do him great harm, he was prepared to approve and support the inclusion in the autonomy bills of a clause perpetuating the educational system as it existed at the moment before the territories became provinces. This he would agree to; but nothing more. Having as he thought made his position quite clear he departed on his travels.



Mr. Sifton's subsequent ground for quarrel with Sir Wilfrid was not, as has been frequently stated, because the autonomy bills were drafted and gone on with in his absence; it was that Sir Wilfrid had drafted a bill, introduced it into Parliament and committed the government and the party to it, which in its educational clauses went beyond the point which he had set as his ultimate limit of concession. Mr. Sifton had agreed to the school system of 1904 being perpetuated. This was the original system of 1875, established by the Dominion Parliament, as modified by successive ordinances by the territorial government. What was incorporated in the autonomy bills was a provision perpetuating the school system in its original form—a system giving to sectarianism in education a warrant which was repugnant to Sifton's strongest feelings and deepest beliefs. In addition to spreading upon the records this objectionable provision, Laurier, to make the fact doubly accomplished, delivered himself of an eloquent eulogy of separate schools, as in every way superior to non-sectarian public schools. Sifton, hurrying to Ottawa in response to an intimation that mischief was afoot, was met at the border by the accomplished fact. In his absence the decision had been made; the die had been cast.

## II

The original provision for education in the North-west Territories was made by the North-west Territories Act of 1875, a measure for which the Liberal government headed by Alexander Mackenzie was responsible. In view of the later battles waged over education it is remarkable that the school clause of this measure should have passed both Houses of Parliament without opposition showing itself, save a word of warning in the Senate by George Brown. The Act made provision for a dual system of schools—Protestant and Catholic—at the instance of the ratepayers.

A majority of ratepayers in a school district, said the Act, "may establish such schools therein as they see fit, and make the necessary assessment and collection of rates therefor"; if the minority of ratepayers in the district objected to the kind of school maintained, they could establish their own school, in which case they paid rates for its support and were relieved of the obligation to support the majority school. Edward Blake, supporting the provision, thought it desirable that a general principle should be laid down with respect to public instruction, in order that the heart-burnings and difficulties with which certain other portions of the Dominion had been afflicted might be avoided. This view being acceptable to both political parties the North-west Territories, at the beginning of their existence, were endowed with a school system intended to facilitate the division of the school population into two religious groups—Protestant and Catholic. Under this law a majority in a school district could create a Catholic school; in a school district where the Catholic ratepayers were in a minority they could create a separate school, Catholic in character. Parliament must have realized that this system would tend, as population increased, to put two schools into every populous district, and in every district of too limited population and wealth to support two schools to make it possible for the majority to establish schools objectionable to the minority.

This was the Federal parliament's idea of the right kind of a school system for the territories: but the people of the territories, as the law began to operate in keeping with its nature, and as their powers of self-government grew, began to question the wisdom of Ottawa. Manitoba's action in 1890, in destroying the dual school system, had immediate repercussions in the territories; and one of the first results of the increased powers of self-government given the Territorial Assembly in 1891 was the enactment of an educational



ordinance which made it impossible for a Catholic school to be established, except in a district where there was already in existence a majority public school; and limited religious instruction in these separate schools to an optional half-hour at the end of the day. Schools were removed from the control of a Board of Education, with Protestant and Catholic sections, and put under departmental control.

The petition of the Roman Catholic hierarchy in 1894 to the Dominion Government, though directed primarily against legislation by Manitoba, took cognizance of imitative legislation enacted at Regina. "The example given in Manitoba has been partly followed in the North-west Territories," the petitioners said. "There the Catholic separate schools have been retained but, in virtue of Ordinance number 22, 1892, they are deprived of their liberty of action, and of the character which distinguishes them from other schools. So that, in reality, the Catholics are reduced, partly at least, to the hardships imposed upon their brethren in Manitoba." A request was made that the Dominion Government should secure the amendment of the offending ordinance. This complaint was transmitted to the Lieutenant-Governor of the North-west Territories, accompanied by the expression of a hope that speedy redress would be given where well-founded complaint or grievance was found to exist. To which request the government of the North-West Territories paid no heed.

In 1901 the North-west Assembly, at the instance of a government of which Mr. F. W. G. Haultain was the head, enacted an educational ordinance which reduced to a minimum the distinctive character of the Catholic minority schools. The school system in the Territories, as fashioned by this and the preceding ordinances, was as close an approach as was possible to a national school system, in view of the constitutional provision of 1875. The first school in a school district, whatever the religion of the

majority of the ratepayers, must be a public (i.e. a national) school. If a minority in such a school district, whether Catholic or Protestant, desired their own school they could create a separate organization, and levy for the support of the school upon their own adherents. But both public and minority schools came under the control of the government. The authorized programme of studies had to be taught in all schools. There was but one qualification for all teachers. All teachers, whatever the schools for which they were destined, had to take the same normal training and pass the same examinations. With one or two exceptions of no consequence there were common text books for all schools. All schools were subjected to inspection by the same inspectors. Religious instruction could only be imparted during the last half hour of the day, and here a conscience clause protected the pupil. The advantages of having separate schools, to those likely to busy themselves in securing them, were thus rendered so inconsiderable that they were not worth the trouble and expense involved in maintaining them. Thus the Territorial Assembly, despite its limited powers and subordinate position, had by 1901 almost completely destroyed the opportunities given to the Catholic Church by the Dominion legislation of 1875, to erect schools of the kind alone acceptable to it—schools under its control both as to teachers and character of instruction.

This watering down of the rights which the Dominion Parliament had undoubtedly conferred upon the Catholic minority of the Territories did not pass without protest. The Dominion Government was urged to disallow the ordinances in turn; when it failed to do this the dispossessed powers wanted the Dominion Government to take steps to test the legality of the ordinances, as to which there were grave and admitted doubts. But the Territories were sheltered and protected by the developments in Manitoba. In winning her own fight Manitoba made any Dominion inter-



ference with territorial educational legislation impossible. But the territorial system functioned under the constant threat that action might be taken to have the embellishments and modifications of 1892 and 1901 removed, as not in keeping with the fundamental law of 1875.

Such was the school situation in the Territories when the question of turning the territories into provinces came up for immediate consideration and action, as it did immediately after the election of 1904. The Dominion Parliament, under the Imperial legislation of 1871, had power to determine the nature of the constitutions with which they were to be endowed; but the constitutional necessity of closely following the precedent of 1867 was recognized. With respect to educational provisions in the new constitutions, Sir Wilfrid proposed to follow the example of 1867 very closely. "Can you doubt," he wrote to J. R. Dougal of Montreal, while the controversy over the autonomy bill was raging, "that if the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan had been admitted into the Dominion in 1867 instead of 1905, they (the people constituting the minority) would have received the same treatment as was given to Ontario and Quebec?"<sup>1</sup> That is to say, the educational rights possessed by law by the minorities would be continued after the union.

But there was a flaw in this argument of which Mr. Sifton was very conscious, as he considered what his attitude should be. The legal rights of the minorities in the older provinces had been given them by the people of the province themselves; the minority in the Territories enjoyed their legal rights by virtue of legislation passed by the Dominion Parliament, a legislative body in which the people of the Territories had not even representation when the law was passed. That Parliament could prescribe an educational system for the Territories was not disputed: but whether

<sup>1</sup>Skelton: *Life and Letters of Laurier*, Vol. II. page 232.

this implied that the provinces, created out of these territories, were bound to regard these privileges as vested rights, was a different question. Mr. Sifton was aware that if a constitutional limitation were imposed the cry of provincial rights would be raised; that the charge of subserviency to dictation by the Roman Catholic hierarchy would be preferred against him and his colleagues. He may have had private reasons for thinking Mr. Fred Haultain, the very able leader of the Territorial government, might make an issue out of the question, seizing the opportunity thus offered to bring to an end the coalition of which he had for some years been the leader, in order that party lines might be drawn in the new provincial legislature.

His personal feelings were in favour of a free hand for the provinces. But upon weighing and appraising the considerations he came to the conclusion that the only solution of the problem that had any chance of being accepted, without a political upheaval, was one which wrote into the constitutions of the new provinces a provision continuing the educational system as it had been fashioned by the Territorial Assembly. Consulting with the seven Liberal members of Parliament representing territorial constituencies, he found them completely in agreement with him. Thereupon he advised Sir Wilfrid of the course which would be acceptable to him and to western public opinion.

When, upon his hurried return from the south, he got the text of the Autonomy Bill, he discovered that the provision imposing an educational limitation upon the western provinces, instead of simply continuing the system created by the ordinances, had revived in all its original sweep and power the legislation of 1875. The limiting clause in the Autonomy Bill was, apart from textual differences made necessary by the change in status, identical with the clause in the North-west Territories Act of 1875. The protests of the Roman Catholic authorities at the limitations upon the



power of the church to erect clerical schools, supported by the taxing powers of the state, had at last borne fruit in Dominion legislation, which made the offending ordinances as though they had never been. And to this Clifford Sifton, the champion of Manitoba's rights in the great school controversy, was expected meekly to give his consent, in the sacred name of the constitution.

### III

Clifford Sifton reached Ottawa on February 26th; had a long interview with Sir Wilfrid Laurier that night; and next morning wrote to the Prime Minister tendering his resignation. In his letter he said: "I have arrived at the conclusion that it is impossible for me to continue in office under the present circumstances, and that it is better for all concerned that I should act at once." Laurier, in acknowledging it, expressed his surprise at its receipt. He had hoped for a comparatively easy solution, as he had carried away from the interview "the impression that the differences between us were more of words than of substance." Of the circumstances surrounding the interviews between Laurier and Sifton and the latter's resignation there have been many reports. One story is that Laurier had no idea that the schools provision in the autonomy bills restored the educational system which had been amended out of recognition by the ordinances, and that he explained this to Sifton, and engaged himself to make things right by amending the provision; but that Sifton, being determined to resign on other grounds, refused to be pacified. According to this version the provision was the work of Mr. Charles Fitzpatrick, Minister of Justice, and Senator R. W. Scott, the leader of the government forces in the Senate, nobody realizing what they were up to until Sifton subjected it to searching analysis.

However, to one at all familiar with the official docu-

ments bearing on the point the mere reading of the schools provision in the autonomy bills was all that was necessary to identify it with the law of 1875, and not with the ordinance of 1901. If Laurier had been intent on recommending to the country the continuance of the existing system he would, in his presentation of it to parliament, have stressed the relative unimportance of the clause; in place of magnifying it by drawing a striking contrast between the virtues of the system that permitted separate schools, and the moral demoralization that was the natural fruit of a national school system. Against this theory, too, are the facts that Sifton tendered his resignation in order to be free publicly to insist upon the provision being amended; that he began to rally parliamentary support for the fight which he planned to make in the Commons; that even after the government made overtures to him for an agreement, he was very doubtful that an understanding could be reached; that he was so convinced of the intentions of those in charge of the bill that, when they yielded the point, he insisted upon them accepting the clause as drafted by him and his legal advisers, since only in this way did he feel that he could be sure that it would completely safeguard the rights he was determined to protect.

These preparations and activities hardly suggest that the door to be forced was standing visibly ajar. Mr. Sifton's correspondence at this time with intimate friends shows that he thought he had a stiff fight on his hands, with the result in great doubt. The announcement of his resignation brought him a flood of letters and his acknowledgements, all written within a week of his resignation, reflect the uncertainties of the time. To one he wrote of the difficulties of the situation. "In fact, it is almost impossible for anyone who is not in touch with the inner movement of affairs to realize what the difficulties are." To another: "I have still some hopes that the difficulty may be adjusted, but I can



say nothing as to the suggestion that this may result in my return to the government. I note what you say in regard to the desirability of my continuing in charge of the Department, but I can hardly believe that it will not be possible to find others who can carry on the work quite as well."

To a former Conservative who had become a supporter in the battle over the Manitoba school question and who wrote pledging continued support he said:

"Sometimes I have wondered, in the heat of political contests, that my supporters who formerly belonged to the old Conservative party stood so fast. It is perhaps some gratification to them to know that when the vindication of their principles conflict with party interests I have been able to follow what, under the circumstances, I thought to be my duty. You of course know the complications and difficulties of a question of this kind, that it has to be settled some way, and that in these matters no one can ever get all his own way. I have decided upon a course which I think, when fully explained, will commend itself to your approval, but whether it is possible that what I recommend shall be carried out I am at the moment quite unable to say."

To an eminent Ontario lawyer: "It is a matter of great gratification to me to know that my own intimate personal friends not only give me credit for proper motives, but also see eye to eye with my views upon what seems to me a most important matter, sufficiently important in fact, if it is pressed to a conclusion, to justify going almost to any length in a political sense." "Let me say," he said to another friend, "that it is one of the occasions upon which I have not the least doubt as to the wisdom of what I have done."

The fact that he sought a compromise was set out in a letter to an old companion-in-arms in Brandon: "The question of a compromise of any kind is now what we have to settle, with all its attendant difficulties. No one knows better than I do that the simple course in politics is not to compromise anything, but unfortunately it is not the road

to practical progress." "You may rely upon it," he wrote to a clergyman, "that nothing but an overwhelming sense of the importance of the issue led to what I fear may be regarded as a final severance of my relations with the Prime Minister, at a period when he seemed to have reached the zenith of his power and influence, and when apparently nothing but success was in store for the Liberal party."

Something is known of the interview between the Premier and Mr. Sifton which preceded the resignation, from statements made by the retiring Minister to his friends at that time. To Sifton's declaration of his intention to resign, Laurier replied that this evidence of distrust of him as a French-Canadian and as a Catholic by Protestant Liberals suggested to him that *he* should retire from the leadership—the first application apparently of a pressure that was thereafter employed at critical moments in party management. This left Sifton unmoved; he answered that he must decide upon his course, and it was for Sir Wilfrid to decide upon his. Nothing that Sifton said about the interview supports the story that Laurier agreed that a mistake had been made, and that there would be an adjustment that would set matters right. The feeling, that in time became almost an obsession with Laurier, that he must not be asked to do anything that would affect his prestige with his own people, was already taking possession of him; and the certainty that any change of front on this question, particularly after his brave words on the second reading, would give his enemies and critics a chance to score against him in Quebec, made Sifton's demand for the withdrawal of the provision and its replacement, by a substitute which he undertook to draft, one to which he did not feel that he could submit. He suggested, however, that Mr. Sifton should submit a draft of an alternative clause; and the interview closed, with Mr. Sifton confirmed in his impression that if his alternative proposition was to have any chance of



acceptance, it would be necessary for him to step out of the government and make himself the leader in the House and out of it of the forces that, when the case was put to them, would powerfully second his demand. Public opinion manifested itself so unmistakeably upon the announcement of Mr. Sifton's resignation, that negotiations were promptly opened with him by the government which, after a period of doubt and excitement, ended in the acceptance of terms literally dictated by the insurgent ex-Minister.

Twenty-five years after the original controversy irrefragable evidence was tendered in the Canadian Parliament of the character of the conflict between Laurier and Sifton, and of the extent of the latter's achievement in forcing a modification of Laurier's original plans. On April 29th, 1930, C. H. Cahan, M.P., then a prominent member of the Conservative opposition, looking about for an opportunity to make a little party capital for use in the province of Quebec in the election campaign then impending, revived the dead and gone issues of 1905. The Anderson Government of Saskatchewan, of the same political faith as Mr. Cahan, had just enacted legislation restrictive of language and religious privileges enjoyed by the minority; and the Liberal campaigners in Quebec were taking notice of the incident. Mr. Cahan made the point that if the Liberal government in 1905 had not consented to a modification of the constitution as first introduced, Mr. Anderson would not have been free to pass the offending provincial legislation of 1930. He pointed out that the law as introduced in 1905 revived the organic law of 1875. "That bill if enacted," he said, "would have rendered such legislation as was recently enacted by the Legislature of Saskatchewan *ultra vires* of the Legislature of that province." But "after the Honourable Clifford Sifton had resigned office in the government, and the Honourable W. S. Fielding had publicly protested against the terms" of the bill, Laurier and



*From a painting by Kenneth Forbes*

SIR CLIFFORD SIFTON  
Privy Councillor





his government had limited the rights and privileges of the Roman Catholic minority to the very restricted rights allowed them under the ordinances.

Honourable Ernest Lapointe, Minister of Justice, did not deny the accuracy of Cahan's statement, though he took occasion to remind him that much of the opposition which forced the compromise came from the Conservative party. Upon the particular point at issue Mr. Lapointe said:

"Let me tell my honourable friend that I was a member of the House in 1905, and I have a pretty vivid recollection of the events that took place at that time. My honourable friend referred to the first clause relating to the schools of the western provinces which, as he stated, was passed in the act of 1905. He complains that this clause has not been made law but has been replaced by another one. My honourable friend might have given some reasons for that. Certainly, as a student of political history, and as a man who was already in political life at that time, he knows that it would have been impossible to carry that clause through parliament at that time, and it was replaced by another clause which represented a compromise. As far as I am concerned, I have no hesitation in saying that I would have preferred the first clause 16 of the Autonomy Act. The second clause, as I said, was a compromise in order to have the legislation accepted by parliament. But, sir, as to that second clause which my honourable friend says preserved only a remnant of their rights to the minority, preserved only what he called meagre rights, why does he not say that that clause was adopted by parliament notwithstanding the hostility and violent opposition of his friends on the other side of the house?"

Mr. Henri Bourassa also took part in the discussion. He was in 1905 a prominent member of the House. He agreed that it was the opposition offered by Mr. Sifton and Mr. Fielding that forced the government to abandon the original clause. Mr. Bourassa attributed Mr. Sifton's course to a desire to destroy the government, in order that an administration might come in which would tear up the Grand Trunk Pacific arrangement and give the new transcontinental road



to Mackenzie and Mann. Upon the principles and motives which underlay the actions of Sifton, Mr. Bourassa is perhaps as poor an authority as there is in the world; the disposition and native beliefs of the men were antipathetic. But in dealing with the origins and intentions of the educational provisions of the autonomy bills he speaks with authority. Mr. Bourassa told Parliament on April 29th, 1930, that instead of retiring from parliament in 1904 as he had intended, he came back "at the insistent request of Sir Wilfrid Laurier and Sir Charles Fitzpatrick, the then Minister of Justice, in order to help them have these autonomy bills prepared, especially with regard to the minority rights therein."

The bills were carefully prepared; he took an active part with Fitzpatrick and others in preparing the school clause. Following Mr. Sifton's resignation, Mr. Fielding's threat of resignation and the activity of the Conservative opposition the government, Mr. Bourassa said, became frightened. Mr. Bourassa added:

"Mr. Sifton, as well as Mr. Fielding, made it quite clear that the text which had been substituted by the government on account of the combined threat of the group represented by Mr. Sifton and of the Tory opposition, with the exception of five or six members, had the effect which the honourable member for St. Lawrence-St. George said it had—that of suppressing completely the minority rights in every section where the minority in the province was represented by a local majority. In other words, it changed the whole basis of the school legislation by substituting for the organic law of 1875 a disposition adopted by the North-west Territories."

The testimony of Mr. Bourassa and Mr. Lapointe may be accepted as conclusive. The purpose of those who prepared the autonomy bills was to restore the law of 1875. This was in keeping with a suggestion made years before by Sir John Thompson who, in advising against the disallowance

of the ordinances, said that Parliament could re-establish the original law when the time came to create provinces out of the Territories.<sup>1</sup> The differences between Mr. Sifton and Sir Wilfrid were thus matters not of words but of substance—so serious, so deep that before they could be adjusted the government and the party were placed in jeopardy.

#### IV

With the announcement of Mr. Sifton's resignation the country found itself over-night in a turmoil. The opposition which flared up at once based itself upon a demand which went far beyond the position which Sifton had taken: it rallied around the simple effective cry, "Hands off the new provinces!" The ultra-Protestant feeling of the country, which was largely Conservative in politics, became rampant on the instant; but this was less menacing to the government than the outbreak in the Liberal party of a demand that the government pay respect to the party's policy of provincial rights. This feeling in Ontario was voiced by the *Globe*, then regarded as the principal organ of the party. While the Federal parliament, it held, might provide for separate schools in a territory, it had no right to impose them for all time by a constitutional enactment upon a province. The situation which Sifton had foreseen, and by seeing had been led to favour a middle course, was now rapidly developing—a head-on collision between those who wanted a system of church schools clamped on the new provinces, and those who wanted the autonomy acts swept clean of every vestige of educational guarantees for the minority.

Sifton found himself in the middle of the vortex preaching moderation. The Liberal and religious forces that wanted a fight to the finish called to Sifton to lead them; and he had to take time off from his wrestling with Laurier

<sup>1</sup>There is a reference to this in Mr. Bourassa's speech in Parliament, April 29th, 1930.



and Fitzpatrick to tell them that the interests of the country called for compromise. To one very eminent church leader, who transmitted to him a copy of a protesting resolution passed by a presbytery supporting it with the advocacy of a policy of "no surrender", he wrote:

"We are face to face with an impasse. I simply do not believe that a constitution for the new provinces can be passed in the present parliament without some limitation; and that in the present stage in the affairs of Canada to have a complete smash-up, followed by dissolution and a re-casting of the parties on religious and racial lines, presents the prospect of a national disaster to such an extent that it is impossible to contemplate it with any degree of equanimity."

Mr. Sifton defined his position to Sir Wilfrid with complete candour. If the government would accept his proposition, which he regarded as a reasonable compromise, he would bring all his influence to bear in parliament and in the country to secure its acceptance; if not, he would take the field against the legislation and do his best to defeat it and the government. In the latter event there was not much doubt in his own mind or in the mind of Sir Wilfrid that he would make his fight, not on the suggested compromise, but on the simple easily grasped principle that the provinces should be left free to make their own laws about education.

Laurier was urged by the intransigent element in his following not to give way; he was assured that the bill in its original form could be passed.<sup>1</sup> Sifton had his doubts on this point. Writing to a friend on March 7th, he said: "There is just a bare possibility that the Catholic party might be able to convince Sir Wilfrid that he could carry it over our heads. I doubt it; but he might. In that case the damage would be irreparable." But Laurier, watching the

<sup>1</sup>"The Minister of Justice (Mr. Lapointe) has said that it was found impossible to pass that clause, but I know too much about it—I know it could have been passed."—Henri Bourassa, M.P., in the Canadian House of Commons, April 29th, 1930.

rising commotion, grew less and less inclined to listen to the heroic advice of the young lions of Quebec who were spoiling for a fight.<sup>1</sup> He decided that it would be necessary to fall in with Mr. Sifton's ideas.

Then came the difficult, tedious, dangerous business of drafting an alternative clause. At the very outset of the trouble Mr. Sifton submitted a draft clause to Sir Wilfrid, accompanying it with a letter in which he said:

"In my judgment it is as far as we can go, and I think it clearly carries out what was at first suggested to the Northwest members. I only wish to add that as in all such cases it should be understood that if further discussion or examination should show that the words are capable of being construed into something other than what is intended, the present draft shall not be considered final."

This draft was now taken as the basis for negotiations. H. M. Howell, K.C., of Winnipeg was called into consultation by Mr. Sifton and the western members; and represented them in conference, with Mr. Fitzpatrick, the Minister of Justice. If current reports were reliable these conferences upon occasion were spirited—the gentlemen not having acquired at that time the judicial poise which they afterwards displayed, the one as Chief Justice of Manitoba, the other as Chief Justice of Canada. Suggestions for a compromise abounded. The most obvious one coming from many sources, including the official opposition, was simply to incorporate Clause 93 of the British North America Act in the autonomy bills. This meant saddling the province with litigation to determine the legal rights of the minority,

<sup>1</sup>Orange Lodges denounced the measure as reactionary, iniquitous, insidious, vicious. Dr. Carman, General Superintendent of the Methodist Church, termed it mad, monstrous, hideous and oppressive, and Goldwin Smith, who retained little of his Protestant faith save a rooted dislike of ecclesiastics, declared it bound the new province for ever to maintain and propagate the Roman Catholic religion. Presbyteries, Baptist conventions, Ministerial associations, demanded its withdrawal. Skelton: *Life and Letters of Laurier*, Vol. II, page 229.



with a strong likelihood that the rights given by the Dominion parliament in 1875 would be found to be intact; it was widely recognized that there was doubt as to the validity of the ordinances.<sup>1</sup>

This prospect did not please Sifton and his associates, and finally they decided that the only safe course to follow if the educational system of the territories, as set up by the ordinances, was to be protected, would be to validate these ordinances by the autonomy bills themselves. The original clause applied the law of 1875, by the repetition of its terms; the substitute clause declared that the law should be as fixed by the ordinances. It was a volte face for the government, but for the preservation of the party and the restoration of tranquility to the public it had to be made. Perhaps a letter by Mr. Sifton to the writer of this book bearing date March 11th, might be here appropriately quoted as throwing light upon the situation.

"I think we have practically agreed upon the Act. The draft may now, I think, be said to be finally agreed to, but it is understood that it is not to be given out to anybody. The reason for this is that if it were given out it would be attributed to some particular persons and probably attacked on that account. As at present arranged it will be placed upon the order paper towards the end of next week, and the Bill will probably be taken up the following week. The final draft has followed the suggestion contained in your telegram of yesterday, that is to say, it applies the British North America Act, Section 93, to the new provinces, but a new sub-section is drawn and enacted in the place of sub-section 2 of Section 93. This new sub-section follows the first sub-section as shown in the draft sent to you, except that Chapter 31 of the North-west Ordinances is not mentioned. Chapter 31 provides for the distribution of the Legislative grant, and instead of confirming it we added a short provision to the effect that in distributing monies appropriated by the Legislature, for the aid of schools organ-

<sup>1</sup>Sir John Thompson as Minister of Justice had given an opinion that the ordinance of 1892 was beyond the powers of the North West Assembly.

ized under the School Ordinance, there shall be no discrimination against any particular class of schools. Then a Section is added to make sub-sections 3 and 4 applicable by the necessary verbal changes. I think we have got it into the best possible form. It has been given a very large amount of consideration and discussion. The point to be made in discussing it with our friends is to show that the Church is absolutely eliminated. There is no possibility of the Church getting its finger on the schools known as "separate schools" under the present North-west Ordinances, and the result is that they are shut out forever unless they can get the people of the North-west Territories to give them something more, which I apprehend is putting it upon very safe ground.

"I have had to make a very determined fight about the School Lands Fund. This is in reality where the conflict was hottest. They did not expect to get much more in the way of separate schools than they have now, but they expected to get a declaration in the Constitution which could not be repealed, and which would give them a vested interest in the proceeds of the School Lands which would be an inducement to the Catholic people to organize as many separate schools as possible.

"It is of the utmost importance that the Methodist, Presbyterian and Baptist clergymen in Winnipeg should be got to see the desirability of supporting this Provision before it is announced, and I would therefore like that you should either yourself or through someone else have them interviewed confidentially, and fully informed as to what is under consideration. On the merits there is no objection to this proposal at all, as you know. The only difficulty that we shall be in will be that some people will not be able to get themselves away from the blind adherence to catch words such as 'provincial rights' and 'separate schools', that is to say, they will not take the trouble to analyse the proposition but will oppose it on theory. If, however, the clergy of Winnipeg support it I am not afraid of anything else."

When the settlement was reached the way was open to Sifton to return to the government, but this he declined to do, for reasons which he thus stated:

"The course which I propose to advocate in the House is not consistent with my former attitude in Manitoba. I



was prepared to stay in the government and defend my change of opinion; but having left the government I do not care to have it said that, in order to get back I compromised my principles. Moreover, I can be of much more service in getting the provisions accepted by parliament and by the people if I speak as a private member."

With the announcement that the bills would be amended the popular excitement died down almost as quickly as it had risen. Sifton's support of the compromise was an assurance to all but the Pope-baiting Protestants that it was reasonable. The Roman Catholics, again with the exception of the extremists, were after reflection well content with Laurier's acceptance of a settlement that continued the conditions that prevailed in the territories at the time of the Union. To those with any sense of political reality it was obvious that their representatives in the government had made a daring attempt to enlarge the educational privileges of the minority and had failed, not from lack of will, but from lack of power.

It was perhaps fortunate that at this moment two by-elections occurred in Ontario. One of these was in London where Charles S. Hyman, the Minister of Public Works, offered himself for re-election. The issue of the propriety of the Dominion Parliament, in the exercise of powers which it beyond doubt possessed, limiting the freedom of the new provinces in the matter of education was presented to the electors with great force. Both the leader of the territorial government, Mr. Haultain and the chief figure in the territorial opposition, Mr. R. B. Bennett, took part in the campaign in person to present this issue and support the demand that the provinces be left free. The high appeal to principle was vigorously seconded by the low appeal to prejudice. The electors were adjured to vote against "Laurier, Hyman, Sbarette (the papal delegate) and the Pope." Liberal victories in both constituencies showed Ontario unwilling to

give encouragement to the agitation; and with the election of Frank Oliver, the new Minister of the Interior, by acclamation in Edmonton, the question passed off the stage as a Dominion issue.<sup>1</sup>

With thirteen Conservative supporting it the Autonomy Bill commanded the record majority of eighty-one on the second reading. Leighton McCarthy, with the memory of his uncle D'Alton McCarthy strong upon him, was the only Liberal to vote against the bill; but it was known that Thomas Greenway, M.P. for Lisgar, former premier of Manitoba, voted for it with some reluctance—for him too there were memories. In the December elections in the new provinces the issue was put before the people by the Conservative leaders, F. W. G. Haultain<sup>2</sup> in Saskatchewan and R. B. Bennett in Alberta; and they voted decisively for a surcease of agitation. While the controversy was at its height the Conservative newspapers of Toronto gave solemn warning that the issue would be carried to the electors at the first opportunity, but in "Facts for the People", the elaborately stated case against the Laurier government circulated by the Conservatives in 1908, there is not a single reference to the events of 1905.

Upon a survey of all the known facts and reasonable inferences therefrom it can be said that Clifford Sifton, by his courage and foresight, saved Canada in 1905 from a devastating race-and-creed controversy. The original programme could only have been put into effect at the price of stirring up bitter and lasting resentments; while a refusal to

<sup>1</sup>Mr. Sifton as Minister of the Interior did not hit things off very well with Frank Oliver, M.P. for Edmonton; on many points they did not agree. But upon Sir Wilfrid consulting him as to his successor he strongly recommended Mr. Oliver for the position, on the grounds of long service and capacity.

<sup>2</sup>Fred W. G. Haultain, as member of the North-West Council, was instrumental in having the powers of the North-West Territories enlarged. From 1897 to 1905 he was premier of the territories, and leader of the opposition party in Saskatchewan from 1905 until 1912, when he became Chief Justice. Knighted in 1916.



in any degree protect the educational rights of the minority would have been equally unacceptable to a large portion of the people of Canada. In his later years Sir Clifford looked back with satisfaction to the outcome of the troubles of 1905, claiming that in the course which he was instrumental in having Parliament pursue he builded better than he knew.<sup>1</sup> But for this solution a price had to be paid. At the age of forty-four, by which time most successful public men are just beginning to make themselves known to the country, Sifton retired, forever as events proved, from office. After fourteen years of continuous service, five and a half years as Attorney-General of Manitoba and eight and a half as Minister of the Interior, he was free from official responsibility.

<sup>1</sup>In a letter bearing date June 1st, 1926, Sir Clifford wrote: "I personally drew the school provisions of the Alberta and Saskatchewan acts. I was not very enthusiastic about them when I drew them, but time is proving that they have established unquestionably the best school system that is possible under Canadian conditions, and if all the other Canadian provinces would adopt these provisions, they would be better off." He used very similar language in an address prepared for delivery to the Canadian Club in Regina in the year 1925, but not delivered owing to a family bereavement: "At the time I had some doubts about whether I was justified in agreeing to the compromise, but I have no doubts now. Time, reflection and the experience of the workings of your educational law has convinced me that the educational provisions of your constitution constitute the wisest and best solution of the vexed question of separate schools that has been reached in any province in the Dominion."

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### SIFTON POLICIES IN REVIEW

I shall be content, when the history of this country shall be written, to have the history of the last eight or nine years, so far as western administration is concerned, entered opposite my name.  
—*Clifford Sifton, 1906.*

WHEN Clifford Sifton found himself, by these startling developments, out of public office, he withdrew from political activities; and opening an office in Ottawa turned his attention to business, for which he had an aptitude not less than that which had made his public career so remarkable. He found the new life so agreeable and satisfactory that when Parliament reassembled for its next session he was not in attendance for reasons which he later explained to the House: "When the present session came round, having under my consideration private matters which if carried to the conclusion to which they seemed to tend would, in all probability, result in my retirement from political life at a comparatively early date, I did not feel disposed to take a very active part in connection with the affairs of the House during the present session." But the events of the session called him back.

The Laurier government, after three victories at the polls and ten years of office had come to the end of its programme of big issues; and in the resulting stagnation the opposition, taking the initiative, decided to make trial of the tactics of submitting the administration of the Government, present and past, to the most searching scrutiny, with a cheerful determination to put the most sinister possible interpretation



upon every act by the Government about which controversy could possibly arise. One of the leaders of the opposition, at a public meeting, engagingly outlined the plan of campaign. He explained that it must needs be, in a business so extensive and diversified as that carried on by the Government, that offences would come; it would be the duty and the delight of the opposition to smell out these delinquencies; to display them to the electorate in all their naked hideousness, and to so mass and present them that the alarmed and enraged populace would rise and rend the offending Government. All this, he explained, would be as easy as it would be effective; and he invited the public to watch the performance. In this spirit and with these hopes the opposition started upon its scandal campaign, which raged through three sessions and the general election campaign of 1908. In addition to very real scores against the Government which, in keeping with what seems to be an inescapable law in politics, had suffered progressive deterioration in efficiency, and in its devotion to the public service, they developed and elaborated so many charges and complaints that were either trivial or without foundation that the public ultimately wearied of the whole campaign, which accordingly ended for them in electoral disaster.<sup>1</sup>

In such an atmosphere of criticism and detraction it was inevitable that Mr. Sifton's administration of the Department of the Interior, which had been a target for attack year after year, should come in for rough treatment. In fact, the occupants of the opposition front bench in the session of

<sup>1</sup>Following the election of 1908 which resulted in a substantial Liberal victory, Sir Andrew Macphail discussed, in the *University Magazine* for December, 1908, the reasons for the Conservative failure: "To put the matter briefly," was his conclusion, "the Conservatives failed because their campaign was too picayune. The issues they presented were too small." In the same article he said: "The country was offended by the aspersions which were cast upon it, and did not look with toleration on the traducers of its public men. Canada occupies too important a place in the world to permit indulgence in the political methods of the mining camps."

1906, vied with one another in discovering and holding up before Parliament and the country acts for which Mr. Sifton was responsible, upon which they exhausted their powers of denunciation. Midway in the session the assailed ex-minister re-appeared in his seat, considering it his imperative duty—so he told the House—to “let my honourable friends on the other side of the House know that I am prepared to meet in debate any honourable gentleman who sees fit to impeach the transactions of the Department of the Interior while I was in charge of it.” He made his defence on May 31st, in a speech which, all things considered, is entitled to be regarded as his highest debating achievement.

The speech was an exposition of the principles which underlay his policies, with a detailed defence of his actions in certain cases which had been the object of sustained attack; the defence being lightened and varied by raids into the enemy country, in which with the half-humorous irony of which he was a master he drew contrasts and made comparisons disconcerting to his honourable friends across the gangway. It was a *tour de force* which has its own place in the annals of the Canadian Parliament; and after a quarter of a century, though the issues with which it dealt are now only a matter of record, it cannot be read in the sedate pages of *Hansard* without the reader, given a touch of imagination, recapturing some of the contemporary appreciation of the performance. The speech closed on this note:

“Sir, I can only say in conclusion, that while I am conscious—nobody can be more conscious than I am—of the many defects and weaknesses of the administration for which I was responsible, still I am bound to say that I do not come here before the House to apologize for any of the matters to which my honourable friends on the other side of the House have referred. I have given my version of the matter as it has appeared to me; I have placed the facts before the House to the best of my ability; and I shall be content when



the history of this country shall be written, to have the history of the last eight or nine years, so far as western administration is concerned, entered opposite my name."

## II

As illustrating the character of the attacks and the nature of the defence, a brief reference may here be made to his reply to charges arising out of the Saskatchewan Valley Land transaction. This was a typical case. It illustrated the character of the developmental policies which drew the fire of the opposition; the reason for these policies; and the justification for them which their author put forward. The opposition could see nothing but the fact that a syndicate of business men had made money out of an arrangement into which the Government had entered with them; and from it they drew the most sinister inferences. To the Minister it was a sensible productive arrangement which had proved profitable to both parties. The Government had gone into it to further a definite purpose; this being achieved it did not worry Mr. Sifton that the parties of the second part had made a bit of money.

In the year 1882 the country between Regina and what is now the City of Saskatoon was surveyed; and thereafter the even numbered sections in this area were open for homesteading. Eight years later this stretch of country was opened up by a railroad running north and south. By 1902 there was close settlement for the first thirty miles north of Regina, and then for about sixty-five miles there was absolute wilderness. In this whole district there were only three homesteaders. There was not a station on the railway line. Incoming land seekers, in Mr. Sifton's words, "settled around the Regina plains, crossed this desert, went through it by the thousands, would not look at it, went north and settled; here in the Spring of 1902 was this spot on the map in the shape of an absolutely unsettled country." The odd-numbered sections in this area constituted the reserve out of

which the Q'Appelle, Long Lake and Saskatchewan Railroad Company were entitled to choose a million acres, this being the land grant allowed them to assist in building the road. The railroad company had selected 128,000 acres in the southern and more fertile section. They had agreed to select an additional 224,000 acres; but they refused to locate the remaining 773,000 acres in the reserve on the ground that the land was not worth taking. They tried unavailingly to have the Government take the land and allow them \$1.25 per acre; and even entered suit in the Exchequer Court to force the Government to take this action.

In the Spring of 1902 a syndicate of business men, mostly real estate operators on a large scale, began negotiations with the company to buy their land, and at the same time they offered to buy the even-numbered sections from the Government. The Department of the Interior declined the offer, saying no proposition would be acceptable which did not embody conditions leading to direct and immediate settlement. The negotiations continued and finally an arrangement was made. This in brief was as follows:

The syndicate, after placing twenty settlers on free homestead land in a township, and twelve settlers on land purchased by them from the government, could buy the remaining even-numbered sections in the township at \$1.00 per acre. There were sixty-four even-numbered quarter sections available in a township. The company, after putting settlers on half of these quarter sections, could buy the remaining even-numbered sections. All told the company, subject to certain other regulations, could buy up to 250,000 acres. The company also contracted to buy 450,000 acres from the railroad company.

Arrangements being completed, the Saskatchewan Valley Land Company was formed. Its leading members were prominent business men of the north-western states



and of western Canada. The company proceeded forthwith to place the necessary number of settlers and then to acquire the remaining land. This enterprise in its initial stages was viewed with amused incredulity by most of the business men in western Canada who knew about it. The railroad company had so little faith in it that it refused to open a station in the selected area until the land company agreed to pay the salary of the agent. An opposition newspaper in Winnipeg held that it was a shameful thing for the Minister of the Interior to "bunco" guileless Americans into buying worthless land. The writer has a vivid recollection of hearing, at a meeting of Winnipeg business men, sharp criticism of the Government's action, with predictions that the colossal failure that was inevitable would ultimately do great damage to western Canada.

Instead of these gloomy predictions being realized the enterprise was a huge, almost instantaneous, success. "The coming of this company," said Mr. Sifton, "was the beginning of the great success of our immigration work in the West." The company opened over 2,000 selling agencies in the western states; they carried on for those times an advertising campaign of extraordinary range and effectiveness; they ran excursion trains with prospective purchasers. Within fifteen months there were over eleven hundred homesteaders placed with "breakings" which aggregated 25,000 acres, thus fulfilling their contract with the government. Mr. Sifton, speaking just four years after the making of the contract said that in the previous year, going over this area he had visited one farm with a yield of 120,000 bushels of wheat, three yields of 40,000 bushels and another with 30,000. He added: "In going through this tract a year ago this month I saw on that land which in the Spring of the year 1902 was an absolute desert without anybody on it, without means of substance for man or beast, I saw on that tract last year villages, elevators, stores, hotels and the

largest wheat field I ever saw in my life. That is the result of the operations of this company. I venture to say that presented to the ordinary business man, he would say that this is a pretty fair transaction on the part of the Interior Department." He agreed that the promoters had gone into the enterprise in the hope of making some money: "They wanted to make some money out of it, if you will, and that is a proper ambition on the part of anybody; I may say it is the ambition that most people have when they go West."

Mr. Sifton's purpose was to settle the West. He had, by a stroke of business, turned a studiously shunned district into a smiling populated countryside; and he congratulated himself, the Government and the country upon the achievement. There was in his defence a note of exultation, not of apology.

### III

Mr. Sifton in this address touched briefly, vigorously and scornfully on other charges which had become a staple of attack (and so continued until after the election of 1908, when they went into the limbo of forgotten cries). One was the accusation of "family graft", which arose from the fact that among the lessees of timber limits from the Department there appeared the name of T. A. Burrows, his brother-in-law.<sup>1</sup> There was, he said, only one justification for the sale of timber by the Government: the need of supplying the settlers with lumber. Following this, he had during his term of office sold 4,000 square miles of timber lands, not, he thought, an excessive amount. He contrasted this with the 29,000 square miles disposed of during the preceding administration, most of it without any bonus being paid, at

<sup>1</sup>Theodore A. Burrows, a native of Ottawa, spent his life in western Canada as a lumberman. He also took an active part in public life. He was member of the Manitoba Legislature 1896-1903; and member of the Dominion parliament for Nelson 1904-1908. Appointed Lieutenant-Governor of Manitoba 1926. Died January, 1929.



a time when the country was almost empty of settlers.<sup>1</sup> Under his administration all limits put up for sale were advertised; notification of the sale was sent to all parties who had asked that they be notified; and further, these limits were invariably awarded by public competition to the highest bidder. One would infer from the attacks, he said, that Mr. Burrows had rushed into the lumber business, when he found his brother-in-law in charge of the Department, for the purpose of securing timber lands in an improper way. But these were the facts: "Mr. Burrows began to be a lumberman about thirty years ago. He had been in the lumber business when he was a boy, and dealt with the Department of the Interior for timber limits when I was in private life, practising law, and before I was a member of parliament or a member of the legislature. He got timber limits from the late Conservative government and got them for nothing. He has been doing a lumber business—he never did any other business so far as I know—in an area where timber was owned by the federal government, and where, if he wanted to continue his business, he had to keep on dealing with the Department of the Interior. Will anybody suggest that because I became Minister of the Interior, my brother-in-law was to go out of the business which he had followed for fifteen years? That would be a ridiculous suggestion. What he did do was to go on just as he had been doing before, doing business with the Department of the Interior, taking his holdings under the regulations of the department, just the same as any other citizen of Canada had a right to do, just the same as he has a right to do from now on, no matter who may be Minister of the department."

In the later sessions of this parliament the attack upon

<sup>1</sup>These concessions almost in their entirety reverted to the government owing to inability of the lessees to operate in the absence of markets which would have been available had the country been settled with greater rapidity.

Mr. Sifton's administration of the timber lands was resumed with great vigour; in the session of 1907-1908 it occupied, what with debates in parliament and investigations before the Public Accounts Committee, weeks of time. The opposition complained that under the regulations a percentage of the timber lands alienated had got into the hands of speculators. It was also held that by reason of the failure of the government to value the timber and fix an upset price, valuable limits had been disposed of upon terms injurious to the public interests. Extremely rosy estimates of the value of these timber limits were made—estimates which, in not a single case, were verified to even a moderate percentage in later years by results. There were also charges that insufficient time was given when limits were put up for competition. Mr. Sifton made a further statement in Parliament in defence of his policies on February 6th, 1908. The regulations about which complaint was made were those drafted by the Conservative Government in 1889 after the breakdown of their earlier policy. He had found these regulations in force when he took office: they had seemed to him satisfactory; and they had continued through his whole administration unchanged, except that he had in 1903 regularized the custom by which annual leases were renewed for as long a period as timber remained to be cut, by incorporating this right in the lease. This was necessary, he said, before lessees would invest large amounts of capital in mills; substantially, there was no change. "Everybody knows", he said, "that when a man buys timber limits, if he complies with the regulations from year to year, he is entitled to get a renewal. On what other principle would a man pay \$500,000 for a timber limit?" That there had been an undue alienation of the timber resources, having regard to the lumber requirements of the country, he denied; at the rate at which alienation had proceeded during the eleven



years between 1896 and 1907 it would take, he estimated, two hundred years to exhaust the timber resources controlled by the Dominion Government in western Canada.

Mr. Oliver, the Minister of the Interior, in the same debate pointed out how the need for lumber had mounted in the west, and how successfully this demand had been met under the policies which were under attack. In 1881 there had been a lumber cut in the west of 13,000,000 feet; in 1896 the cut was 34,000,000 feet; for the nine months ending in March 1907 it was 141,000,000 feet. The number of mills rose from fifty-five in 1896 to eighty-nine in 1907. "I think", said Mr. Oliver, "it is fair to say that having succeeded in securing the development of the lumber industry, and having secured it by the alienation of something less than eight thousand square miles, this government's administration stands in a much more favourable light than the administration of their predecessors who, with an alienation of some 30,000 square miles of timber, only succeeded in getting a lumber cut of 34,000,000 feet in the year 1896."<sup>1</sup> Mr. Oliver, in the same speech, reviewed the methods by which timber land since 1896 had been alienated. In every case berths had been sold to the highest bidder; there was no question of personal or political favouritism. "It was a question of open competition, and the man who put in the highest bid, accompanied by the necessary cheque, got the berth."

There was also the "scandal" of the closed grazing leases. In the settlement of every frontier country there always comes a time when there is a conflict of interests between the rancher and the would-be homesteader who covets the range-land. By the time the Sifton immigration policies

<sup>1</sup>The difference between this estimate and the 4,000 square miles mentioned by Mr. Sifton in his speech of May 31st, 1906, is accounted for by additional grants in the intervening years, plus about 2,000 square miles which had been allotted during the earlier Conservative administration.

were bringing yearly an influx of population, settlers began to press upon the cattle ranches in southern Alberta; and a persistent demand began to be made that the land should be opened up for settlement and the ranches done away with. The dispute supplied an ideal theme for impassioned oratory. On the one hand were the honest land-seeking settlers looking for homes; on the other the haughty plutocratic cattle-barons with their thousands of acres leased from the government, at the nominal rate of two cents an acre. Were cattle to be more highly regarded than industrious home makers? "The land for the people" was the rallying cry of the critics of the government. The Sifton correspondence shows that the problem engaged his attention almost from the day he took office; but it did not become acute until about 1904. He was then driven to make a choice. He had either to open the land for homesteading; or he had to decide in favour of the ranchers. In the event of their claim being preferred the ranchers, in the face of mounting and continuing pressure, demanded, as a condition of making necessary capital expenditures, greater security of tenure than was given by the earlier arrangement of revocable annual leases.

After getting the best available information and studying the situation on the ground he came to a definite finding. It fell to his successor to put the policy into effect; but Mr. Sifton in his statement to parliament took the full responsibility for it. Referring to an address which had just been made to the House, Mr. Sifton said: "My honourable friend is evidently hunting for somebody to take the responsibility for certain grazing leases granted in the North-west Territories. Well, let me tell him that he need search no longer, I am here to take the responsibility for these grazing leases." These leases were for twenty-one years subject to cancellation on two years notice, and the lessees were permitted to buy one-tenth of the leasehold at a dollar an acre to



provide headquarters for the ranch. Sifton's reasons for his policy were bluntly stated. The land was not fit for farming and it would be ruined for all purposes if opened for homesteading. This is what he felt about it:

"The view I took as regards the areas which will never be fit for farming is that they should be maintained for grazing purposes, and the view I further took is that unless these areas, which are wholly fitted for grazing and not fitted for anything else, are let out in leaseholds, so that portions of them will be irrigated and the rest protected, the result will be that the natural sod of the prairies will be destroyed and all pasturage destroyed. And you will then have a vast area, such as Montana has, absolutely fit for nothing."

Mr. Sifton's bold declaration that he had found for the ranchers was accepted by his critics as a confession of guilt; and great was the resulting clamour.<sup>1</sup> Ultimately the pressure proved irresistible; and the government, cancelling the leases, opened the lands to settlement. The settlers rushed in; broke up the soil; found that crops could not be grown; went broke and starved; and either moved out or were removed by government aid to localities better suited to farming. Behind them they left a ruined waste, "land desperate and done with". For years past the agricultural ex-

<sup>1</sup>The "infamy" of these closed grazing leases was much discussed in the election of 1908, except in the districts in which the leases were given; in those areas there was either a judicious silence or, as was notably the case in the matter of the Robbins immigration scheme, one of the star exhibits, there was explicit approval of the arrangements by the local Conservative candidate. Mr. Oliver, Mr. Sifton's successor, discussing the issue of closed leases at Maple Creek, October 6th, 1908, said:

"Given a certain area, suitable for grazing and not for farming, and I am certain that the granting of a closed lease, with proper provisions as to the number of stock, is sound public policy. The government granting such a lease is entitled to credit for doing what is for the country's advantage. Neither the man who obtains the lease nor the government that grants it is entitled to be called 'looter of the public domain', thief or robber; or to have their names peddled up and down the country, as though they were parties to a scandalous transaction."

perts of the Dominion and Alberta governments have been trying unavailingly to restore the "buffalo wool" in the hope that ranching may be resumed. Sifton's vindication by time has been so complete that upon this point there is no longer room for a difference of opinion.

Thus in the session of 1931, just a quarter of a century after Mr. Sifton made his defence, H. A. Mullins, Conservative member for Marquette, who in his earlier days was a rancher in Southern Alberta made this observation:

"I hear wailings from those men south of the main line of the Canadian Pacific Railway, from Swift Current to the Mountains, who are settled on land that should never have been taken away from the ranchers. We gave way to the men who came in with the prairie schooners, thinking they were going to better their conditions; but what happened? The honourable member opposite, the ex-Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Motherwell) brought in professors from the United States to find out if grass could be sown, in order to bring back the land which had been taken from us. We left that land fertile and rich, but they exploited the soil with the usual result. That district should never have been ploughed, and certainly should never have been taken away from the rancher."

#### IV

Clifford Sifton's proud declaration to Parliament that he was willing to have his name entered on the page of history opposite the record of western administration for his eight years of office, testified to his belief that the task entrusted to him had been well and truly discharged and that the results would be enduring. Had he ever been asked to say what he regarded as his greatest achievement as an administrator there would have been no hesitation in his answer. He would have said that the task which made the heaviest demands upon his energy, his resourcefulness and his patience was that of securing settlers for the empty west. To have failed here would have meant shipwreck; whereas



his success in this respect opened the way to a whole series of triumphs of administration and policy. In his lugubrious letter to the electors of West Durham, in 1891, Edward Blake charged that the real tendency of the Conservative policy was towards disintegration and annexation. Further, "it has left us with a small population, a scanty immigration and a north-west empty still." If this description fitted conditions in 1891 it was equally applicable to 1896; the intervening years had brought no lightening of the tones of the sombre picture.

But no one—not even the most jaundiced pessimist—would have employed Blake's terms in 1905 to describe conditions in Canada. In the interval there had been transformation; and the words that echoed in men's minds were Laurier's confident assertion that the twentieth century would be Canada's century.

The transforming power which enlarged cities, built factories, deepened canals, covered the land with railway lines and changed the spirit of the people from despair to one of high ambition derived in the first place from the great human stream that flowed into the country from Europe and America during these years. The time was still thirty years distant when the gates were to be closed, and strong Ministers of the Crown were to turn pale at the news that some resourceful immigrant had wormed his way through the walls and into the Forbidden Land. In those far-off days the immigrant was a personage to be welcomed and made much of, even though he came from the high steppes of Russia. He and his like were signs that the long desired tide of people was at last setting in.

The statistics, in which the results of Sifton's drive for immigrants are baldly recorded, are eloquent in themselves. In 1896 there came into Canada 16,835 immigrants; next year immigration showed a slight increase rising to 21,716; then to 31,900; in 1899 to 44,543. By the turn of the

century the cumulative effects of the varied immigration devices were beginning to show; in 1903 the flood passed the 100,000 mark; in 1905 it reached 146,266. The count of immigrants entering Canada during the Sifton regime exceeded half a million. Those intent on disparaging the achievement were in the habit of representing this great tide of immigrants as drawn mostly from the deeps of central Europe; the new settlers were referred to compendiously and interchangeably as "the scum of Europe" and "Sifton's pets." The impression that Mr. Sifton's immigration policies flooded the west with unassimilable Slavs still lingers as an echo from those days of bitter controversy; but there is no warrant in the records for any such belief. The Slavs are listed in the returns as Galicians, Austrians and Russians—they were in fact Ukrainians—and putting them together and contrasting the totals with the immigration from the United Kingdom it will be found that in no single year did the Slav immigration begin to approach the immigration from Britain in volume. In 1896 the proportion of Slav immigration was sixty-three per cent. of the British; thereafter it diminished until in 1904 it was only twenty per cent. In addition to the British immigration there were the immigrants from the United States, the great majority of whom were of Anglo-Saxon stock, many of them of Canadian descent. The official records for the six years ending December 31st, 1904, may be quoted upon this point.

Year	British	United States	Slavs
1898	11,608	9,119	5,509
1899	10,660	11,945	6,700
1900 (6 months)	5,141	8,543	6,302
1901	11,810	17,987	6,428
1902	17,259	26,388	10,309
1903	41,792	49,473	17,418
1904	50,372	45,229	10,522
	<u>148,642</u>	<u>168,684</u>	<u>63,188</u>



It was the usual practice for the campaigners against the Sifton immigration policies to represent the "Galicians" as highly undesirable settlers; and then to proceed to give figures of the total foreign immigration in the expectation, not infrequently realized, that in the minds of the not too well-informed electors "Galician" and "foreign settler" might become convertible terms. From this point it was easy to go on to draw a gloomy picture of the imminence of the day when western Canada would become a colony of central eastern Europe. Thus the premier of Manitoba (R. P. Roblin) speaking in Picton, June 10th, 1907, said that it was only a matter of five years, certainly only of ten years, when the foreign-born citizen of western Canada "could if they chose take all matter of government absolutely into their own hands." The census figures of 1906 supplied the appropriate antidote to those fears. These showed that, excluding the American settlers, the percentage of the population of the western provinces of foreign birth was for Manitoba 12.3 per cent.; for Saskatchewan 20 per cent. and for Alberta 15 per cent. No widely-held political belief was ever more baseless than the conviction, which became firmly fixed in many minds and of which traces still survive, that Clifford Sifton's immigration policies flooded the western plains with Slavic settlers, to the exclusion of British immigrants.

This is not to say that he was not eager to get all the Slavic settlers, of the right type, that were obtainable. The value placed at that time on central European immigration is revealed in a letter from Lord Strathcona, who had general charge of immigration operations in Great Britain and on the continent, to Mr. Sifton, bearing the date November 15th, 1899. He expresses his satisfaction that results are at least beginning to appear from "our work which has been going on all the time, necessarily unobtrusive"; and makes the observation that now that there was "a respectable

nucleus of foreigners in Canada" there would be a certain movement year by year. Mr. Sifton never changed his mind as to the virtues of the Central European peasant as a western settler.<sup>1</sup> Speaking to the Toronto Board of Trade in March, 1922, at a time when there was a loud popular demand that the government make greater efforts to induce immigration, he stressed the value of immigrants of this type. "When I speak of quality I have in mind something that is quite different from what is in the mind of the average writer or speaker upon the question of immigration. I think a stalwart peasant in a sheep-skin coat, born on the soil, whose forefathers have been farmers for ten generations, with a stout wife and half-a-dozen children, is good quality." But this did not mean that he thought that there was no need for discrimination. In public statements and still more vigorously in private speech he dissociated himself from all responsibility for the flood of central Europeans who came into Canada in the years subsequent to his administration. With the cancellation by the government in December 1905 of the contract which he had made in 1899 with the North Atlantic Trading Company the means were lost, in his opinion, by which discriminating selection of these immigrants could be made.

During the years of the "scandal" campaign much was heard of the North Atlantic Trading Company. From the time of the Conservative Government until 1899, emigration to Canada from Europe was in the hands of individual booking agents; for immigrants of certain types—farmers, farm

<sup>1</sup>At a time when the flood of criticism of the "Galicians" was at its height, R. L. Borden, then leader of the Conservative party in opposition, said a word in their favour (*Hansard*, April 23rd, 1908, page 7070): "In the year 1903 and again in 1904 I said to this House that I had been subject to some prejudice against these people, but that I had gone to the west and I had been agreeably disappointed, that I believed the Galicians would make good settlers; and I repeat the statement now and state my belief that we would hardly be able to distinguish the second generation from the sons and daughters of Canadians in the west."



labourers, railway workers—a bonus was paid, usually one pound for adults and ten shillings for minors. Immigration work was carried on under difficulties, owing to domestic laws against inducing emigration, and the Canadian government was largely in the hands of these agents.<sup>1</sup> In 1899, after consultations in London between James A. Smart, Deputy Minister of the Interior, W. T. R. Preston, Commissioner of Immigration, and Lord Strathcona, an arrangement, exclusive in character, was made with an organization of booking agents, which called itself the North Atlantic Trading Company. This company undertook to carry on immigration work throughout European countries committed to its charge, and to make, from emigrants offering, a selection of those desired by Canada. They stipulated at the outset that their names were not to be made known, as a protection against prosecution by continental governments. In writing to Mr. Sifton on the concluding of the arrangement Lord Strathcona said: “I need hardly point out that the new arrangement must be regarded as very confidential and that it must not be made public in any way.”

This engagement as to secrecy, while doubtless essential to the arrangement, had undesirable political consequences. Refusal by the government to spread the names of the members of the syndicate upon the public records gave the political opposition an opportunity, of which it took full advantage, to suggest that the arrangement was a sinister and corrupt one, from which certainly the departmental officials and conceivably the Minister profited. Sir Wilfrid Laurier's assurance that he had looked into the matter, and had found that the names on the list were those of respectable shipping firms exclusively located on the continent—

<sup>1</sup>As indicating the difficulties and dangers in carrying on work of this character, a visit paid by Lord Strathcona to Hamburg in 1898 for the purpose of seeing the booking agents was followed by a protest from the German Government to the British Government. Lord Strathcona, it was pointed out, had broken the German law in inciting booking agents to induce emigration to Canada.

in Germany, Holland and Russia—had no effect at the moment in mitigating the fury of partisan suspicion, though in retrospect it will doubtless be accepted by all as conclusive.<sup>1</sup>

The manner in which the arrangement operated to ensure a moderate supply of immigrants of the right "quality" was set forth in some detail in the address which Sir Clifford Sifton made to the Board of Trade in Toronto in March, 1922:

"The great emigrating centre of the continent was Hamburg. Steamships go there to load up with people who are desirous of leaving Europe. The situation is a peculiar one. If one should examine twenty people who turn up at Hamburg to emigrate he might find one escaped murderer, three or four wasters and ne'er-do-wells, some very poor shop-keepers, artisans or labourers, and there might be one or two stout, hardy peasants in sheepskin coats. Obviously the peasants are the men that are wanted here. Now, with regard to these twenty men, no one knows anything about them except the shipping agents. These men are sent in from outlying local agencies all over Europe. They arrive at Hamburg, and the booking agents have their names and full descriptions of who they are and where they come from. No one else has this information. We made an arrangement with the booking agencies in Hamburg, under which they winnowed out this flood of people, picked out the agriculturists and peasants and sent them to Canada, sending nobody else. We paid, I think, \$5 per head for the farmer and \$2 per head for the other members of the family.

"This arrangement was carried out through the agents of a company known as the North Atlantic Trading Company, which was merely a company incorporated by the agents and employees of the booking houses. The steam-

<sup>1</sup>W. T. R. Preston, who was the special object of suspicion in relation to this matter dealt with the organization of the North Atlantic Company at some length in *My Generation of Politics and Politicians*. He says (page 261): "Twenty years have gone by and for all I know everyone in that company may be dead. But I will bear record that there never was a more honest contract, nor one more honestly carried out by those with whom the government made it, than in the case of the North Atlantic Trading Company."



ship companies did not like this arrangement. The Canadian steamship agents did not like it. The result of the arrangement was that they lost a lot of business, because immigration which was not useful to us was sent to other countries in very large volume. Eventually a political agitation was begun against the North Atlantic Trading Company, and the government finally cancelled the contract and abandoned my policy. The policy was completely and perfectly successful while it lasted. There was not one-half of one per cent. of the people we got from Hamburg who were not actual agriculturists. Almost without exception they went on farms, and practically without exception they are on their farms yet, if they are alive. If not, their children are there."<sup>1</sup>

The United States immigrants, who in number exceeded those from Great Britain during the Sifton period, were the product of a self-selective process which gave Canada settlers of the highest type. They were, almost without exception, actual and experienced farmers who transferred their operations from the western states to western Canada, because they saw an economic advantage for themselves and their sons in exchanging an acre of high priced land for ten acres equally good in a new but rapidly developing country. They brought themselves into the country; they located themselves; they had farm equipment and capital; and they became immediate producers of wealth. Of all the classes of immigrants who came into Canada during the early years of the century the Americans yielded much the highest percentage of farm owners.

For British immigrants Sifton looked chiefly to the north of England and to Scotland; he doubled his agencies in those areas, and he gave these agencies a bonus larger than that accorded the southern agencies. Of the settlers obtained by these means he spoke in the warmest terms of approval: they were settlers of the very highest type. He

<sup>1</sup>The full text of the address appeared in *MacLean's Magazine*, April 1st, 1922.

could not be interested in efforts to transfer people from the cities of Great Britain to the western prairies. "Let it not", he said, "be imagined that you can gather up tens of thousands of people who have neither any desire for, nor adaptability to, the life which is ahead of them, and turn them into farmers. It takes two generations to convert a town-bred population into an agricultural one. Canada has no time for that operation."

## V

The inflow of immigrants began to show itself at once in durable evidence of development and prosperity. Homestead entries supplied a yearly test of the growing effectiveness of the Sifton policy. In 1896 there were only 1,861 such entries; in 1904 there were 32,682. In the eight year period of his regime there were 115,479 entries; that is to say, that number of farmers—mostly heads of families—began farming, each upon one hundred and sixty acres of land, the gift of the government. To this vast army must be added the large number of wealthier farmers who were brought in by colonization companies, such as the Saskatchewan Valley Land Company, and settled on lands which they bought. Everywhere in the west the shining plow was breaking the age-old prairie sod; over the high or rolling prairie, vacant since the dawn of time, the smoke from countless new homes rose in the air. As this vitalizing current of living energy stirred the west into life, wheat began to flow outward to the markets of the world—the dribblets from each farmstead formed a district rivulet, and by the confluence of these numberless streams the great river of wheat took form and direction. To serve it and the needs of its creators railways were built with feverish haste, elevators arose to be guidemarks to the prairies, towns sprang into being, distributing industries appeared. The story of western development in those years is the story of the



mounting wheat acreage. In Manitoba a bare million of acres in 1896 produced 14,371,806 bushels of wheat; in 1905 there were grown in the province 55,761,416 bushels of wheat from 3,141,537 acres. Comparative figures from the two other prairie provinces are not available. But the census figures for 1891 show 113,808 acres in wheat in the Northwest Territories with a yield of 1,792,409 bushels. There was but little development during the next five years: but by 1900 there was a yield of 5,103,820 bushels from 530,273 acres. In 1905 the corresponding figures were 1,524,116 acres with a yield of 34,835,041. Taking the west as a whole between 1900 and 1906—years in which the Sifton policies were beginning fully to register themselves—the wheat yield rose from 18,129,182 bushels to 117,364,000 bushels.

The extent of the problem created by the needs of this vast development is suggested by the figures of railway mileage. In 1896 there was not a single new mile of railway built in Manitoba or the Territories. In the next ten years 2,507 miles were built. A map of the west for the earlier date shows a vast expanse of territory crossed from east to west only by the main line of the Canadian Pacific Railway, and from north to south, outside of Manitoba by two branch lines hundreds of miles apart. Ten years later the country shown is criss-crossed with lines and the vacant spaces are filled with the names of new and aspiring towns. A study of the censuses of 1891, 1901 and 1906 in relation to the map of western Canada reveals in a striking way the spread of development in these fifteen years and the intensity of this development at focal points. These comparative figures of town population are illuminating:

	1891	1901	1906
Brandon .....	3,778	5,620	10,408
Winnipeg .....	25,639	42,340	90,153
Killarney .....	.....	585	1,117
Neepawa .....	774	1,418	1,895
Selkirk .....	950	2,188	2,701
Souris .....	.....	839	1,413
Dauphin .....	.....	1,135	1,670
Calgary .....	3,876	4,382	13,573
Edmonton .....	.....	4,176	14,088
Regina .....	.....	2,249	6,169
Moose Jaw .....	.....	1,558	6,249
Yorkton .....	.....	700	1,368
Weyburn .....	.....	113	966
Wetaskiwin .....	.....	550	1,652
Cardston .....	.....	639	1,001
Indian Head .....	.....	768	1,545
Raymond .....	.....	.....	1,568
Vermillion .....	.....	.....	623
Moosomin .....	.....	863	1,152
Rosthern .....	.....	413	918
Saskatoon .....	.....	113	3,011

These points are taken from every considerable section of the west; to the imaginative eye they are more eloquent than words about what was going on over the whole expanse of the prairies during these years. Towns pop up from the bare prairie—like Saskatoon, which first makes its bow to the world in the census of 1901—and multiply themselves in the course of a few years. The totals of population are still more expressive. On the great plains west of Manitoba there were in 1891 less than 100,000 people; in 1906 the total for the province of Alberta and Saskatchewan had risen to 443,000. In Manitoba the population rose from 152,506 to 364,688.



In this vast act of transformation which turned a wilderness with a handful of depressed people into a great community of busy thriving hopeful men there were many participants; but the vision that saw the possibilities and the practical sagacity that made the dream attainable were Sifton's. The western Canada we know was largely the product of his courage and imagination. Well might he have said when he laid down the powers and the responsibilities of office: "*Si monumentum requiris circumspice.*" "If you seek my monument look around."

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### PUBLIC SERVICE AS A PRIVATE MEMBER

I shall ask you to assume with Aristotle that man is a political animal, endowed with physical and mental gifts which clearly point to a life in the society of his fellows, and that it is only through a life passed in the commonwealth and for the common weal that he can deploy to the best advantage the gifts with which he has been endowed.—*H. A. L. Fisher.*

**A** PART from brief interventions in defence of his administrative policies Clifford Sifton was virtually silent during the parliamentary sessions of 1906 and 1907. He never could interest himself in the small change of politics; but that large enterprises with developmental features held a fascination for him was revealed anew when, as a private member, he threw himself whole-heartedly into the promotion of a great inter-imperial transportation project which came to be known as the All-Red Line. This proposition with its bold but simple provisions and its clearly defined objective was the kind of creative project that appealed to him; and for the best part of two years he gave up much of his time to promoting it. The idea of a fast combined steamship and railway service from Great Britain to the Antipodes by way of Canada had been in the air for a decade or more; but it was not until Sifton explored its possibilities and reduced it to terms that it appeared in definite outline. It would perhaps be within the mark to say that the project was his primarily, and that the interest in it of Sir Wilfrid Laurier and the Dominion Government was due to the vigour of his advocacy. He went to London



in April, 1907, in advance of Laurier, who was due to attend an Imperial Conference in May, and associated himself with Lord Strathcona, High Commissioner for Canada, in the furthering of the scheme. It was Sifton who, after conference with Laurier and Strathcona, reduced the proposition to terms and drew up a memorandum embodying the arguments for the projects. Briefly the plan was as follows:

Four ships of 20,000 tons, with an average speed of 24-knots and with accommodation for 1500 passengers, were to be placed on the Atlantic, running to Halifax in winter and Quebec in summer. These boats were to make the passage in from four to four and a half days, thus giving a service competitive with that supplied by the fastest steamer to New York. Trains were to cross the Continent to Vancouver in four days. Upon the Pacific there was to be a fleet of five steamers of 8900 tons, capable of steaming 18 knots an hour; these were to run to Sydney via Honolulu, Suva and Auckland. This would, it was estimated, cut down the time from London to New Zealand from thirty-six days to twenty-five days. A subsidy of a million pounds a year would be necessary; and there was a tentative allocation of this sum: Great Britain £500,000; Canada £325,000; New Zealand and Fiji £100,000; Australia £75,000. This large annual sum would be reduced in fact to a considerable extent through the absorption of existing subsidies. The allocation of the lesser sum to Australia was due to the fact that the advantage to that Commonwealth was comparatively slight, the P. & O. service being about equal to that projected in point of time and having advantages in the matter of carrying freight.

This proposition was submitted to the Imperial conference by Sir Wilfrid Laurier and, after a discussion, a resolution declaring that it was desirable that Great Britain should be connected with Canada and through Canada with

Australia and New Zealand—by the best services available within reasonable cost—was adopted. Upon the conclusion of the conference Sir Wilfrid Laurier reported progress to Sifton, who had already returned to Canada. He wrote that Lloyd George and Asquith were favourable; and that Campbell-Bannerman, the Prime Minister, though personally sympathetic, found it necessary to have further material with which to combat a determined opposition which was being offered by some of his colleagues. Laurier wrote:

“The objection which he (Campbell-Bannerman) had to meet is that there would be no equivalent for what the British Government would have to pay. I told him that the question was more a political than an economic one. As to this he agreed with me, but he would like to have some arguments to overcome the opposition within his own party and within his own Cabinet. He would like to be able to show that there is an equivalent for the sacrifice which he would have to make. I told him that the equivalent was in the shorter time for the delivery of the mails. He is not convinced that this can be done, and I promised that I would have a memorandum prepared for him to that effect.”

Sir Wilfrid Laurier requested Sifton to apply himself to the preparation of this memorandum, and this was done. Later in the year Mr. Sifton returned to London and there sought to enlist popular support for the schemes. These included addresses to various public bodies. On December 3rd he strongly advocated the route before the Liberal Colonial Club. He stressed the saving in point of time and the commercial and strategic advantages of the route, particularly the Atlantic section of it. “If there should be war”, he said, “the Atlantic route would be of inestimable worth in bringing food to Great Britain or in transporting troops to India and the Orient.” While thus engaged in soliciting support for the scheme he encountered, to his surprise and indignation, an organized business, which had a vested in-



terest in representing Canadian sea routes as specially dangerous. He found that his statement that the Canadian routes were as available as those to New York excited resentment. "At once", he later told the Canadian parliament, "a very serious discussion arose as to the accuracy of the statements I had made, and the hostility of a certain portion of the Press became distinctly manifest. And when it is remembered that the insurance underwriters have a distinct interest in maintaining a certain position in regard to Canadian traffic, it will be evident what the source of some at least of the hostility is." Thereupon, he further told parliament, he had re-checked his information and was confirmed in his belief that there was less danger from fog on the northern than on the southern routes and that no serious danger was to be apprehended from ice. But he found a rooted, unchangeable conviction that the Canadian routes were dangerous, justifying the levying by the marine underwriters of higher insurance rates.

At the following session of the Canadian Parliament Mr. Sifton made two addresses in support of the scheme; one on March 20th, in speaking on the budget, and the other on July 9th in support of a resolution submitted to the House by Sir Wilfrid Laurier, asking it to endorse the resolution passed by the Imperial conference, and to affirm that Canada was prepared to assume her fair share of the necessary financial obligations. He put the case for the route in terse striking sentences: "So far as travel and transportation are concerned, Canada is on the side-street, instead of on the main thoroughfare. What this proposition means is that Canada would be put upon the main thoroughfare instead of upon the side-street. If I argued for a month, I could not make it any plainer than that. All the great social, political and commercial advantages which come from being on the main avenue for this traffic would come to Canada if this scheme were carried into effect."

He also found it necessary, in view of the heated political atmosphere to make a personal explanation of the reasons for his interest in the matter:

"There has been some misunderstanding with regard to me and to my position in connection with the matter, and I think it but right that I should say a word in explanation. I have not had, and I have never expected to have, any interest in this project other than that which any member in this House has or ought to have in any great project affecting the well-being of Canada. I never expect to have any financial interest in it, and the part I have taken in it was simply intended to promote a favourable view amongst that portion of the public of Great Britain with whom I had an opportunity of coming into contact. My interest in it is simply that of any other patriotic Canadian. . . . I may add that I do not think that anyone who may interest himself in promoting the project can sensibly look forward to deriving any financial benefit from it. It is one of those things that will have to be first of all promoted, pushed forward and carried on by those who are willing to devote time and attention to it for the purpose of promoting the general welfare of the British countries concerned."

This observation had particular reference to reports that this was in reality a Canadian Pacific Railway Company enterprise with which Mr. Sifton had identified himself. In the discussion it transpired that, notwithstanding Lord Strathcona's active interest in it, the project was not acceptable to the Canadian Pacific Railway Company, Sir Thomas Shaughnessy, the President, taking occasion to set out his objections to it to the Imperial Cabinet Committee and also by a public statement. The Canadian Pacific position was that they were already supplying a steamship and railway service between Great Britain and Australasia fully adequate to the requirements of the times. This was in fact a Sifton-Strathcona conception, which they put forward and supported in the belief that it would be a good thing for Canada and for the Empire at large. They were, however, too enterprising for their day. The project never really took



form. Canada remained alone in its open engagement to support the enterprise. The British Government took the position that if Canada, New Zealand and Australia could agree upon a plan, they would be prepared to give it careful consideration. No such agreement, it transpired, could be made, though Canada sent the Deputy Postmaster-General to Australia in the hope of reaching an understanding. The influence of the P. & O. Steamship Line and all its allied interests was directed against the enterprise, both in Great Britain and in Australia, and this was too powerful to overcome. There are in the Canadian *Hansards* for the sessions of 1909 and 1910 occasional references to the scheme; and then all mention of it ceases.

## II

The close association of Laurier and Sifton in furthering the All-Red Line project very nearly resulted in the latter re-entering the government. Sir Wilfrid faced, upon his return from the Imperial Conference of 1907, a ticklish job of cabinet-making. Two important portfolios were vacant: Railways and Public Works. There was no lack of aspirants for the vacant positions. While they were in London Sir Wilfrid made a definite offer of the Ministership of Railways to Mr. Sifton. Lord Strathcona, who was intensely interested in the All-Red Line project, brought all his powers of persuasion to bear upon the ex-Minister to accept. Mr. Sifton returned home with the issue undecided in his mind. He retired to Assiniboine Lodge, his country home near Brockville; and during the month of July canvassed the question thoroughly, calling some of his more intimate political friends into consultation. To them he expounded, with frankness, the state of his mind.

The prospect of belonging to a government brought no thrill to Mr. Sifton. He had had fourteen years of office; the mere filling of a cabinet seat meant nothing to him. But

he was not averse to re-entering active political life—on terms. But if the terms were not satisfactory the proposition was not attractive. His terms were that there should be a reconstruction of the government, and that instead of entering the government alone he should be accompanied by three colleagues. He also had very clear ideas as to the colleagues he desired. Mr. Sifton stated his reasons for making these stipulations in some such terms as these:

"I was not Sir Wilfrid Laurier's colleague for eight years without finding out that he is, despite his courtesy and gracious charm, a masterful man set on having his own way, and equally resolute that his colleagues shall not have their way unless this is quite agreeable to him. I had a good many experiences of the difficulty in getting my policies accepted and acted upon where they did not make a special appeal to him; I should perhaps never have been successful in giving effect to some of the things upon which my heart was set if I had not had in the cabinet three or four associates who backed me up, and whom I in turn backed up. At that", with a smile and a laugh that was in part a chuckle, "the old chief was very frequently too much for us all. These colleagues upon whom I relied, are gone: if I went back now I should be pretty much alone. Upon that basis I'd be more useful to Sir Wilfrid, who doubtless has definite ideas of the services which he can command from me, than I should be to the causes and policies which alone reconcile me to public life. The situation, I am sure, would become impossible for me in a short space of time. But if Laurier will take in some new timber—men with fresh ideas with whom I can work and upon whom I can rely for co-operation—I shall be willing to take a chance. Not otherwise."

He mentioned freely the names of men who would make suitable colleagues and who might be available if they were offered cabinet rank. George P. Graham, then leader of the Ontario provincial Liberals was one of the men he had in mind; Lyman P. Duff, now a member of the Supreme Court bench was another; J. H. Ross, now a senator, was a third.



There came a day in August when Sifton was summoned to Ottawa for a final consultation. Lord Strathcona had arrived from London to support Laurier's request with his solicitations. Late that night he returned to Assiniboine Lodge to tell some friends (the writer included) that he had not been able to come to terms with Laurier, and that he had definitely declined his invitation to join the government. Laurier had said to him that while he would not deny that the government might be better for an infusion of new blood, the acceptance of the Sifton terms meant that he would have to get rid of some of the most elderly members of his cabinet; that, he frankly admitted, he could not bring himself to do. They had been, he said, colleagues together in the old barren days of opposition and he couldn't ship them off in the days of success. This was magnificent, but not politics. In the interchange of views no names apparently were mentioned; but everyone knew the venerabilities whose retirement would have been forced by the acceptance of Sifton's terms. The infirmities of age compelled the retirement of one of the trio within a twelve-month. Laurier and Sifton, the negotiations over, parted good friends; and Sifton returned to his retreat in tranquil mind, without a regret, apparently, that he had closed the door upon his return to the high seats of office. If there was disappointment that his efforts to rejuvenate a government, whose capacity was patently on the decline, he gave no signs of it, then or later.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>"Had the Honourable Clifford Sifton accepted the offer to re-enter the Government the matter would have been speedily and satisfactorily settled, but the Ex-Minister of the Interior has declined. The Prime Minister and his colleagues regret that they have been unable to persuade Mr. Sifton to join the administration at the present time. The announcement that he would probably return to the Cabinet was received with enthusiasm by the Liberal party from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and the Conservative papers are good enough to admit that his presence in the administration would be a source of strength to the Government, but as he decided not to do so, Sir Wilfrid had to look elsewhere for a colleague."—Ottawa Correspondence, the *Toronto Globe*, August 28th, 1907.

The failure of these negotiations was a turning point for Laurier, for Sifton and for the Liberal party. The acceptance of Sifton's terms by Laurier would have meant, in fact, that he would have returned as second in command of the party, the inevitable successor to Sir Wilfrid. His voice would have been potent in council; and he would have become the organizing and planning mind of the party. There would have been, under these conditions, no approaches to the United States; no reciprocity pact; no election in 1911. There would have been instead a general sharpening of nationalist policies which probably would have been reflected in part in tariff changes.

There is plenty of room for free speculation as to what would have been the political consequences of such an arrangement; they certainly would have been vastly different from those which followed the breach between Laurier and Sifton in 1911. Perhaps the inevitable seeds of that breach were sown when the negotiations of August 1907 broke down. The cordiality of the relations between the two men insured close co-operation between them for the remainder of the parliamentary term and for the following general election; but the circumstances attending the negotiations herewith set forth, damaged beyond repair the relations between Mr. Sifton and some of his old-time associates who were still colleagues of Sir Wilfrid. The knowledge of his proposition to Sir Wilfrid, which in time came to them, filled them with indignation, with resentment and with fear; and once the election of 1908 was over and they found themselves once more in warm and comfortable official quarters they proceeded, so far as their power went, to insulate Liberal officialdom from contacts with this dangerous and ambitious innovator. In which they succeeded only too well.



## III

Politics in Canada touched their nadir in the session of 1907-8. The session lasted eight months and it was one long tournament of mud-slinging, with no lack of experts on either side. The campaign of innuendo, suggestion and open attack which had been carried on, relentlessly, by the opposition for three sessions, reached its climax with the certainty that the members would go direct from the heated atmosphere of the Commons chamber to the hustings. The Government forces countered in kind; the best defence being attack, they pursued certain prominent members of the opposition, against whose business and political records there were question marks, with a venomous effectiveness that cancelled out, in very large degree, the elaborately contrived opposition campaign. The session was not so much a discussion of public issues as a vendetta, in which quarter was neither given nor asked. A religious paper, protesting against these parliamentary rivalries in vituperation quoted the line "they left not even Lancelot brave nor Galahad clean". It is a remarkable circumstance that our politics should have taken on the characteristics of a blood feud at a time when the two parties were led by men to whom this kind of political warfare, directed to the murdering of reputations, must have been odious. Conditions were doubtless too strong for them; they had to give leash to their swordsmen and bravos.

In all this confusion of attack and defence, of charge and counter-charge, Sifton took no part. The arrows and slingshots came his way, but he took no notice of them. Since his retirement from office he had twice spoken on the subject of the charges made against his administration of his department; once in 1906, when he made a reasoned and detailed defence; and again more briefly in 1907. This was enough. "They say. What do they say? Let them say!" The old proud Scotch slogan exactly expressed his

attitude towards the whole "scandal" campaign.<sup>1</sup> It cannot be said that his contemptuous silence operated to discourage his assailants; rather they redoubled their efforts in the vain hope of stirring him into controversy. He held to his course. His work as an administrator was over; his record, in its strength and weakness, its successes and failures, was before the people; he would take unquestioningly their judgment and the judgment of posterity.

It thus happened that in the long, turbulent pre-election session Mr. Sifton made only two set addresses to the House, the most important being his contribution to the debate on the Budget. In this address (March 20, 1908) he dealt with current vital questions, but he spoke with the poise and detachment of one who was above the battle. This balanced, non-partisan deliverance was a cool oasis in the desert wastes of heated party contentions; and both Parliament and the country were grateful for a performance that in some measure tended to restore their self-respect. It was of this speech that the parliamentary correspondent of the *Toronto News*, an opposition paper, wrote in these terms:

"What an intellect the public service of Canada has lost in Clifford Sifton! It is safe to say that that thought was in the mind of almost every man within the sound of his voice to-day. He spoke on the budget; his speech was the most important utterance on the policy of Canada heard for years. And the ability—the breadth of vision, the keenness of sight, the practical sagacity, the condensed clarity of expression—what a man we have lost! Understand this. He spoke for seventy minutes. During that time he uttered nothing but hard facts; every sentence was business. Really

<sup>1</sup>Mr. Sifton's refusal to be drawn into wrangles of this character extracted a world of admiration from the *Toronto News*, September 1907. "Few men have been so savagely and so bitterly attacked as Mr. Sifton. Few have so seldom met insinuation with insinuation, or denunciation with denunciation. In the main he has eschewed the personal part of politics and has dealt simply with the merits of public questions and public policies."



he delivered seven speeches; he had something of great importance to say on seven subjects!"

It was in this speech that Mr. Sifton made his wholehearted declaration against the continuance of the spoils system, which has already been quoted.<sup>1</sup> The Civil Service should, he said, be systematically reinforced from the universities. "In England," he said, "the graduates of Oxford, of Cambridge, and of the great public educational institutions are constantly appointed in large numbers to the public service." The same system should be adopted by Canada. He also advocated the further broadening-out of the Department of Trade and Commerce into an effective agency for the promotion of trade, and for the filling of the trade agencies that would thus be created he again urged the appointment of young men specially trained by the universities. "If we can train scientists and geologists to go into the field; if we can train men for other pursuits in life, surely we can go to the trouble of training men to deal with the most important subject in connection with the commerce of the country." All this has since come to pass; the world is dotted with Canadian trade agencies manned for the most part by men with special university and departmental training.

There had recently been returned to the control of the Government the odd-numbered sections of land in the West that had not been required to fill the demands of the railway land grants. These 30,000,000 acres of land were available for immediate settlement; he urged that, subject to certain reservations, this land should be thrown open for homesteading. He did not favour selling the land at low prices; it would slow up settlement, cripple the settlers and retard production. The result of throwing these lands open to settlement would be to double the stream of immigration

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from the Western States, which it was very desirable to encourage. "I do not think," he said, "that any country could possibly get a better class of settlers than the Western settlers who have come into our north-west provinces; they are vigorous, resourceful, law-abiding, they become citizens the day they arrive in the country and at the earliest possible moment they become producers." But he suggested the reservation of some 3,000,000 acres to be sold for the creation of a fund out of which the Hudson Bay railway could be built.

The Hudson Bay railway project had been quiescent for a decade or more; Mr. Sifton's declaration of faith in the possibilities of the northern route was the first sign that the movement in favour of its development was to be revived. Though he was not favourable on general principles to Government operation of railways, this might properly be regarded as an exception. He expressed his views thus:

"The Dominion Government would be justified in building the 500 miles of railway to Hudson Bay as a Government work, provided it first took the precaution to protect itself by making a reservation of land which would be ample to pay the exchequer every dollar of money expended. Such a reservation would pay the cost of the railway, the wharves, the elevators and everything connected with it, besides the lighting and buoying of the Bay, the surveying of the channel and all kindred expenses."

It was this declaration by Mr. Sifton that again put the Hudson Bay enterprise on the map. It was followed within a few months by a formal acceptance by Sir Wilfrid Laurier of the project as a public responsibility. Thereafter, though there were delays and long periods of hesitation, the commitment of the Government was never wholly repudiated; and in the fullness of time (in 1931, to be exact) the dream of half a century got itself fulfilled. Mr. Sifton completed his seventy-minute speech with a vigorous presentation of



the arguments in favour of the All-Red route to which reference has already been made.<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Sifton played a considerable part in the general elections of 1908. His visible appearance in the campaign was in the West—chiefly in Manitoba, though he lent a hand to the Saskatchewan Liberals. With his retirement from the Government in March 1905 and his intention, long persisted in, not again to offer himself for election, Mr. Sifton withdrew from active participation in the activities of the Liberal party in Manitoba, with the result that the organization, which for ten years had relied upon him almost exclusively for direction, virtually went to pieces. When, almost on the eve of polling, his services were commandeered by Sir Wilfrid and he was entreated to take charge of the Manitoba campaign, he found that he had essayed a task beyond even his resourcefulness and energy. In the time at his disposal—a bare five weeks—he could not rebuild an organization capable of holding the line against the assault of the provincial Conservative phalanxes, then at the

<sup>1</sup>Evidence of the profound impression which this speech made upon the public is supplied by the contemporary Press. The *Hamilton Herald* hailed it as a welcome change "after the wearisome course of petty, nagging criticism, personalities, charges and recriminations of politicians busily employed in the manufacture of campaign material." The *Montreal Gazette*, a political opponent, regretted that in the matter of brevity of speeches and marshalling of facts there were so few Clifford Siftons and added: "Mr. Sifton always has had something like contempt for nursery politics and generally he has avoided the personal tattling and wrangling which disfigures so much of our political literature. He goes to the heart of a question, reasons out his conclusions and makes his appeal to the intelligence rather than to the prejudices of the country. His mind is essentially constructive, and he has courage and resource such as few of his contemporaries possess in equal degree. We would understand the man better if this were frankly and generally admitted."

The Parliamentary correspondent of *La Patrie* wrote: "The first impression left by the speech of the member for Brandon is that of the intellectual power of this man, who, though a private member, can still set down, in the name of the ministers, a positive programme. Mr. Sifton is of the race of Warren Hastings and of Cecil Rhodes for the audacity of his conceptions and the energy in execution. He has had parliamentary triumphs such as few public men have known."

height of their efficiency under the redoubtable leadership of Robert Rogers.

Upon the Manitoba sector of the battle-line the Liberal forces were hopelessly handicapped. But Mr. Sifton's real contribution to the Liberal victory of 1908 was made not in the West but in Ontario. The Conservative plan of campaign, fashioned in 1906 and carried out unflinchingly until the ballots dropped into the boxes, was directed towards the capture of Ontario. In that province the Liberal party, after holding office for thirty years, was swept out of power in 1905 by an uprising of the electors who had come to believe, for very good reasons indeed, that it was "time for a change". Revelations of administrative irregularities and glaring cases of electoral crookedness had played a large part in bringing the electors to this opinion; and the Conservative tacticians at Ottawa jumped to the conclusion that this result could be duplicated at the next Dominion election by a similar campaign directed towards flaws, real and imagined, in the administration of affairs by Sir Wilfrid and his colleagues. Hence the "scandal" campaign. Ontario controlled more than one third of the seats in the House of Commons; and an Ontario "sweep" meant certain victory.

The more hopeful opposition prophets looked for seventy Conservative seats out of a total of 86; none of the estimators were prepared to admit that the representation could fall below sixty. These expectations suffered a killing frost on October 26th, election day; after the votes were counted the Conservatives found that the division of Ontario party strength in Parliament was precisely what it had been in the previous Parliament. The Liberal success in Ontario was to them the inexplicable feature of the disappointing campaign of 1908. But the explanation was that the Liberals, as alive to the situation as their opponents, had been engaged for months before the election in building up in every constituency and every poll the most efficient organ-



ization that had ever been known in the province in a Dominion election; and that the whole campaign,—the selection of candidates, the strategy for the province and the individual constituencies, the character of the literature distributed—had been planned with foresight and judgment. Upon the Board of Strategy which, behind the screen of the official organization, planned this campaign, Mr. Sifton served; it derived, in large measure, its directing force from him. It was after months of immersion in this task that he was drafted for service on the Western front and hurried off to rally the broken forces of Manitoba Liberalism and make a stand against the enemy.

It was not until September 22nd, just 34 days before polling, that Mr. Sifton accepted nomination for the constituency of Brandon. His reasons for accepting the candidature were summed up in the closing sentences of his speech of acceptance; "The policy of Sir Wilfrid Laurier represents the completion of the National Transcontinental, the building of a line of railway to Hudson Bay and the development of the natural resources. Negation, criticism and scandal are offered you by the opposition. I do not doubt the verdict which the country will render." He dwelt especially upon the formal acceptance by Sir Wilfrid Laurier of an obligation to proceed at once with the construction of the Hudson Bay railway—which had just been made in the form of a public announcement at Welland—as the main reason why he consented to stand for re-election and remain in public life.

In the election campaign which ensued there were no exceptional features; the Conservatives presented the stock official case against the Government, while the equally official defence by the Government was put forward. But, as the voting showed, the Liberals were overmatched in Manitoba. The effect of four years without leadership showed itself not only in a broken and defective organiza-

tion but in the growth of a critical and doubting attitude towards the Government itself. As usual the supposed deficiencies of the Government's tariff policy were skilfully exploited; and it became necessary once more to put up the defence that if the Liberal tariff was unsatisfactory to the low tariff forces, a Conservative tariff would be doubly so. Thomas Greenway, before retiring from public life to a seat on the Railway Commission, issued a warning to his constituents in Lisgar: "As to the tariff, the West cannot afford to have a change of Government. I have not sat for four years in the Commons Chambers without finding out how entirely just is the charge that the Conservative party is protectionist to the hilt. Its return to power would result promptly in a virtual doubling of the present schedule." But the spirit which ultimately flowered into the all-conquering Agrarian movement was already abroad in the land; and the disposition of the low tariff elements in the community was, to a much greater extent than in the previous elections, to visit their discontent on the Government without bothering about alternatives.

There was the further circumstance that in Manitoba, alone among the provinces, Laurier's name was not one with which to conjure. There was between Laurier and the official Manitoba Liberals a disagreement about the making of lists which had developed, in the case of the latter, into a rankling sore. The contention of the Liberals was that provincial lists, which were not based upon the municipal lists but were compiled by officials appointed by provincial authority, should not be accepted for Dominion purposes until they had been revised under Dominion auspices. To get this modification in the law was a point of honour with the Manitoba Liberals. They believed that they were hopelessly handicapped in provincial elections under the lists compiled under the conditions fixed by the provincial law; it was to them intolerable that they should suffer the same



handicap in Dominion contests. Sir Wilfrid was reluctant to do anything in the matter, for political reasons which had nothing to do with the merits of the Manitoba case,<sup>1</sup> but in 1904 and again in 1908 the pressure was so strong that the Dominion Government promised legislation amending the Dominion Election Act. The same thing happened upon each occasion; obstruction offered by the opposition was followed by a "compromise" in which, for the sake of supposed parliamentary peace, the Manitoba Liberals, as they put it, "were thrown to the wolves".

When they were overthrown for the second time in 1908 by these tactics, the Liberals were greatly angered and deeply chagrined; and the resulting sulkiness was a factor of moment in bringing about the defeat of October 26th. When the ballots were counted only two Liberal candidates were found to be elected in the province; one of these was Mr. Sifton, who had a narrow majority over Honourable T. Mayne Daly, a former representative of Brandon who, like Mr. Sifton himself, was an ex-Minister of the Interior. Mr. Sifton's explanation of the Liberal defeat, given immediately after the election and repeated in greater detail some months later (in an interview in the *Manitoba Free Press*, February 7th, 1909) was that the lists were "stuffed". "To be specific, I state that in the preparation of these lists there has been

<sup>1</sup>"The Liberal policy of accepting provincial electoral lists for Dominion purposes resulted in the Manitoba lists being compiled under conditions to which the Liberals of this province strongly objected, and they fought for years to secure a right to final revision under Dominion auspices. Twice they pressed their case with such vigour that the government undertook to pass the requested legislation but on both occasions resistance in the House by the Conservatives led to the prompt withdrawal of the measure by Sir Wilfrid. In both cases Manitoba Liberals knew quite well that the difficulty was not the opposition of the Conservatives but the opposition of Laurier. They were advised that Laurier was apprehensive of the effect of the proposed legislation upon public opinion in Quebec. He feared the criticism by his opponents that while Laurier would not interfere with Manitoba when it was a matter of the educational rights of the minority he was willing to interfere when it was a matter of obliging his political friends."—Dafoe: *Laurier: A Study in Politics*, page 124.

improper manipulation, in that persons who complied with the law in an endeavour to get their names on the lists have been left off, and that large numbers of names have been improperly placed on the lists and left there."<sup>1</sup> In the following session of Parliament Sir Wilfrid, dealing with the results of the election, referred to these charges by Sifton as though he had heard of them for the first time; and he intimated that they would have to be looked into with a view to remedial action if they should prove to be well founded. The humour of this belated promise of relief was not lost upon the angry Liberals of Manitoba.

#### IV

Though the general election of 1908 gave the Government a majority of forty-seven in the House of Commons, the results in the West were disconcerting to Laurier and to Sifton. In 1904 the Liberals carried three out of four seats in the West; in 1908 the Conservatives divided the territory with them. As the Liberal policies—on the tariff, immigration, railway building, settlement, etc.—had been designed to make the West a Gibraltar of Liberalism to offset the losses in the central-eastern provinces that could be foreseen, this outcome of the 1908 voting was regarded as very unsatisfactory; and promptly after election Laurier called Sifton into consultation. Upon Sifton making it clear that he was not a possibility in the event of cabinet re-construction, he was asked by Laurier to make an intensive study of the western political situation, and advise him as to changes in personnel or policy that might in his judgment be desirable. In consequence Sifton in collaboration with certain advisers, made, after due study of the conditions, a number of recommendations. Sir Wilfrid was apparently grateful

<sup>1</sup>It is perhaps unnecessary to say that these charges were vigorously denied by the Manitoba Government. To establish their case they had a committee of the Legislature find that the provincial lists represented the last word in impartiality and completeness!



for the suggestions and gave intimations that they were to be acted upon. One suggestion was that Ralph Smith, M.P., should be taken into the cabinet as representing British Columbia in place of the Honourable Wm. Templeman, under whose leadership the party had suffered severe defeat in the province, and who had lost his own seat in Victoria.<sup>1</sup> It was also suggested that in addition to Mr. Oliver, who sat for an Alberta seat, there should be a cabinet minister representing more directly the eastern half of the prairie country. In the opinion of the committee the likeliest man for this position was Mr. James T. Brown, a young Saskatchewan lawyer, who had already sat for a term in the Saskatchewan Legislature (as an Independent supporter of F. W. G. Haultain, the opposition leader), and had in the Dominion elections been the unsuccessful Liberal candidate in Qu'Appelle.<sup>2</sup> Laurier pigeon-holed the recommendations and, retaining Mr. Templeman, brought him back into the House by securing the retirement in his behalf of one of the British Columbia members.

<sup>1</sup>The Liberal defeat in British Columbia was probably due much less to Mr. Templeman's deficiencies as a leader than to the vulnerable position in which the Dominion Government was placed by the agreement with respect to Japanese immigration, made by the Honourable Rodolphe Lemieux, representing Canada in 1907. By this "gentleman's agreement" (which has survived all the political changes of the last 25 years) Japan undertook voluntarily to keep Japanese emigration to Canada to minimum figures. This was represented in British Columbia as giving Japan the key to the front door of Canada. To add to the difficulties of the situation for the Liberals there was read at a public meeting in Victoria, two days before the election, a telegram from R. L. Borden pledging the Conservative party to a policy of "absolute exclusion of Asiatics". The telegram appeared in photographic facsimile the following day in the *Colonist* newspaper. This telegram was a forgery; and when this fact was revealed so great was the outburst of public feeling that the Right Rev. W. W. Perrin, Bishop of British Columbia, deemed it consonant with the dignities and powers of his office to give protection to the assailed party executive. He issued a pronunciamento absolving all and sundry from duplicity in an act, which certainly cost Mr. Templeman his seat, except the unnamed miscreant who had confessed his sin to him. No incident could better reveal the depths to which politics had descended in Canada in 1908.

<sup>2</sup>Now Mr. Justice Brown of the Saskatchewan bench.

The incident, in itself, would be too trivial for mention had it not had consequences of a far-reaching character. Sifton accepted it as the final proof that Laurier did not want and would not accept advice that did not match at every point with his own inclinations. Laurier had, he realized, rejected the suggestions because he did not want new men in the Government who would have to be broken in; old colleagues, like old boots, were more comfortable. It was at this point precisely that Sifton dropped out of close association with Laurier and the Liberal leaders; thereafter he took no part in the counsels of the party, nor was his voice heard in defence of its policies in Parliament or on the platform. There was no suggestion of personal pique in this attitude; it was one rather of indifference arising from his decision, now definitely made, not to continue in public life. At this moment, most opportunely, a way was opened up by which he could escape with honour and credit, from political activities in which he no longer took interest, to a field of non-political service for which he was admirably fitted by training, inclination and capacity. This way of escape came to Sifton as an indirect outcome of the reforming activities of Theodore Roosevelt, President of the United States.

## V

Representatives of the Governments of the four North American countries—United States, Canada, Mexico and Newfoundland—met in conference in Washington in February, 1909, to confess their sins in the matter of protecting their natural resources and to make pledges of amendment. It was agreed that each country should appoint a national commission for the conservation of resources; and a programme of common action was set out in a series of resolutions. The Conference thus defined the natural resources that required conservation:



"We recognize as natural resources all materials available for the use of man as means of life and welfare, including those on the surface of the earth, like the soil and the waters; those below the surface, like the minerals; and those above the surface, like the forests. We agree that these resources should be developed, used and conserved for the future, in the interests of mankind, whose rights and duties to guard and control the natural sources of life and welfare are inherent, perpetual and indefeasible. We agree that those resources which are necessities of life should be regarded as public utilities, that their ownership entails specific duties to the public and that, as far as possible, effective measures should be adopted to guard against monopoly."

It was in keeping with engagements thus entered into by Canada that the Commission of Conservation came into being, and in September, Mr. Sifton, who had been one of the Canadian representatives at Washington, was appointed chairman. Thus began nine years of devoted public service. The work was exactly suited to his temperament and his talents; and he entered upon it with enthusiasm. Moreover, it gave him an opening for an honourable retreat from the political scene which no longer had attractions for him. He therefore made the delivery of his inaugural address at the first meeting of the Commission in January, 1910, the occasion for a formal declaration that he had withdrawn from party politics. Every government in Canada had a statutory right to membership in the Commission, and in filling the positions open to nomination there was no suggestion of party interest. Mr. Sifton regarded it as the most truly national body ever constituted in Canada. Hence the necessity for the Chairman to keep himself aloof from party struggles. "I determined, when accepting the position of Chairman," he said, "to dissociate myself altogether from active participation in party political affairs, believing that the work of the Commission will occupy a great share of my time and attention and that, by such a course, I can reason-

ably hope to receive the complete and hearty co-operation of all members of the Commission."

The Commission came into being opportunely. There was work for it to do from the moment of its organization. Big business, in Canada and the United States, was just beginning to sense the potentialities of water-power as the source of wealth and power. Two projects, each looking to the capture of water power on a large scale by private corporations, came before the Canadian Parliament for consideration during the session of 1910. Clifford Sifton, as member, took no part in the lively debate that ensued; but as Chairman of the Commission of Conservation he was active and effective in his opposition. One of these measures had a somewhat innocent appearance. Its purpose was to incorporate the St. Lawrence Power Transmission Company, and to give it authority to transmit power; it carried with it no power rights. But the application was at once identified, rightly, as a warning that the St. Lawrence Power Company was about to make an attempt to develop power on the St. Lawrence, in accordance with rights which had been obtained in 1901 from an unwary Parliament. The St. Lawrence Power Company was the Canadian annex of the Long Sault Company, which had rights acquired from the New York Legislature in the American half of the river; together they constituted, for those days, a powerful corporation intent upon building a power-dam across the St. Lawrence at the Long Sault Rapids just above Cornwall. Fortunately, however, Parliament in giving in 1901 the right to build a dam on the Canadian side of the stream, had stipulated that the consent of the Minister of Public Works must be obtained before work could proceed; and in 1910 this provision, which had only a technical significance in 1901, was seized upon, successfully, to defeat the attempt by a private company to dam the St. Lawrence for power purposes.



The battle was staged over the Transmission Bill, which finally passed Parliament loaded with limiting amendments; but the course of the discussion, in Parliament and outside, was a plain warning to the promoters of the dam that they would not be permitted to carry out their plan.<sup>1</sup> The promoters of the enterprise were facile in their assurances. The navigation of the St. Lawrence would be safeguarded by the building of a lock; and Canada's share of the power would be available for Canadian industry. There was, however, a rooted and general suspicion that while the transmission line for which a charter was being sought might carry a light load of power to towns on the Canadian side, the bulk of the 200,000 horse power (capable of increase to 700,000 horse power) would find a market in the United States, probably in New York City.

Against the proposition that the St. Lawrence power should be turned over to these private companies in accordance with their plans, the Commission of Conservation through its chairman, Mr. Sifton, filed with the International Waterways Commission a memorial of emphatic protest. The point most vigorously stressed was that the building of the dam would mean very slight power development or advantage to the Canadian side of the river, and would involve the monopolization of the whole power available from the rapids. Later in the year Mr. Sifton addressed a number of Canadian Clubs—at Kingston, St. Catharines, Ottawa—upon this question, and in this address he gave in detail the reasons for the stand which the Commission had taken against the project to dam the St. Lawrence:

"I was spoken to by several persons who said we were taking a stand against progress. I say 'No.' I say that in the first place there is no immediate demand for the de-

<sup>1</sup>"I locked horns with the Laurier government when they intended to grant legislation to enable the Aluminum Company of America to get away with power at the Long Sault. It was all but done when I discovered it. I declared war on it and ultimately defeated it. I have been against this large export of power ever since."  
—From a letter from Sifton, dated May 23rd, 1925.

velopment of that power on the Canadian side. As to the American side, let the Americans deal with that; we do not pretend to have anything to do with it. When there is a joint international necessity to have power generated at this point it will be time to start development on the Canadian side. But, I added, as far as I am concerned, the Commission of Conservation will fight the idea of any private company putting a dam across the St. Lawrence river. This is a great international stream; there is an enormous amount of power to be generated; and when it becomes an economic necessity to Canadians that this power should be generated, let it be generated under the governments of Canada and the United States as a joint work; and let the power of the Canadian side be developed and delivered to the people of this side and that on the United States side to the people there—to each in accordance with what the people of the country may require. It is surely clear to any man of common sense that if any water power trust should get hold of power of that kind, it could deliver the energy produced on its own terms and to that extent could practically enslave the people for all time to come.”

In the face of protests like this and the clear intimation of the Government given in Parliament by Sir Wilfrid, that consent for the building of a dam would not be given, the attempt by private parties to collar the power of the St. Lawrence was abandoned for a time. There is a mournful historic interest, in view of the course which power development on the St. Lawrence ultimately took, to note how simple, clear-cut and sound was the policy which Mr. Sifton here suggested as the right one for Canada to follow.

The other power scheme which drew the fire of the Chairman of the Conservation Commission bore the lordly title of the International Waterways Canal and Construction Company, but it was more generally known as the Conmee Scheme, from the name of its promoter—James Conmee, M.P. This, as first announced, was a grandiose project which involved the building of a canal from Lake Superior, via Rainy River, Lake Winnipeg and the Saskatchewan river, to Edmonton, with the incidental picking-up of all



available water power en route. Mr. Sifton declared his opposition in a public interview. "It cannot be seriously claimed," he said, "that the promoters intend to build a canal which is the ostensible object of the bill. The cost would be prohibitive in the present stage of the country's development. No one suggests that the money could be raised for such an undertaking. If this view is correct the bill would simply amount to giving a blanket charter over these important waterways and water-power." The Connée bill had a brief existence. It was first shorn of the clauses which, in the judgment of Mr. Pugsley, the Minister of Public Works, gave control over the navigable streams, and it was then done to death in the Railway Committee.

The experiences of his first few months as Chairman of the Commission of Conservation satisfied Mr. Sifton that his expectations as to the possibilities of the office were not too highly pitched. He planned to give to the work all the time he could spare from his private affairs; and to withdraw from Parliament at the end of his term, abstaining in the interval from any participation in debates controversial in character. In the sessions of 1909 and 1910 he remained completely aloof from all political discussion. His work on Conservation was widening out; and it engrossed his interest. At the end of the first year a number of valuable reports were issued by the Commission. One showed the need for more effective crop rotation on Canadian farms; and another placed the responsibility for 34 per cent. of forest fires upon improperly screened railway locomotives, with the result that corrective legislation was immediately applied. In his second annual address, delivered January 18th, 1911, at Quebec, the Chairman suggested that water-power franchises should be limited to twenty years, and that the provinces should also put a twenty-year limit on franchises for the sale of electric current. The effective opposition of the Commission to the Long Sault project and the

Conmee Bill was recorded, as well as the fruitless attempt to induce the Ontario Government not to permit the export of power at Fort Frances.

In January Mr. Sifton made an important address on Conservation matters to the Canadian Club at Montreal. He drew a powerful picture of the ultimate fate of the western prairies if the head waters of the rivers that cross these plains were not protected by the creation of forest reserves; they would be, in the course of a few generations, a wasted wilderness incapable of maintaining human life. He also summoned the business men of Montreal to the defence of the St. Lawrence against the proposal to build the Long Sault dam. Navigation, he said, was the paramount concern; local interests must bow before the interests of the whole country. The Commission had already, at the instance of its Chairman, suggested a water-power policy covering these points: no unconditional titles; leases subject to development; public control of rates; periodical revision of rentals—thus foreshadowing the water-power policy subsequently adopted by the Dominion Government.

It was at this moment when, to all appearances, Mr. Sifton had left the stormy seas of politics behind and was setting out on a career of quiet usefulness as the head of a non-party national organization, that by one of those astonishing transformation scenes that have not been infrequent in Canadian political history, he found himself catapulted into the midst of a political convulsion. In an instant of time the peaceful Chairman of the Commission of Conservation reappeared in the political arena armed and ready for battle, not in alliance with his life-long associates but in deadly opposition to them. The Laurier Government asked Parliament and the country to accept an arrangement for reciprocal trade with the United States; and to the proposition Sifton, immediately and instinctively, declared his hostility.



## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### THE BATTLE ABOUT RECIPROCITY

On these great questions, which cut so deep into heart and mind, the importance of taking what they think the best course for the question will often seem, even to those who have the most just sense of party obligation, a higher duty than that of party allegiance.—*Gladstone to Granville, 1878.*

SIR WILFRID LAURIER took Mr. Sifton's statement that he was out of politics much too literally. Mr. Sifton was a Front Bench member of Parliament and a Privy Councillor; as Chairman of the Commission of Conservation he was deeply interested in all matters affecting natural resources; he lived in the capital city. Yet in a matter of such major importance as making a reciprocity agreement with the United States which implied a profound change in fiscal policy, it did not occur to Sir Wilfrid Laurier that it might be wise for him to consult his former colleague. This was the more remarkable because he had a very high appreciation of the value of Mr. Sifton's judgment.<sup>1</sup>

According to Dr. Skelton, the news that Mr. Sifton was opposed to the agreement came as a surprise to Laurier. Skelton says, (*The Life and Letters of Sir Wilfrid Laurier*, volume II, page 372): "Sir Wilfrid sent for him when he

<sup>1</sup>Dr. Skelton, in his *Life and Letters of Sir Wilfrid Laurier*, Volume II, page 371, reports this observation by Sir Wilfrid Laurier, obviously made subsequent to the reciprocity election: "Mr. Sifton was the master mind in Parliament. He would discern the current political tendencies, put his finger on the popular pulse better than any other man in my experience. His executive capacity was extraordinary; but not more so than his secretiveness. He never told his whole mind even to his closest intimates. I could not fathom the reason for his attitude on reciprocity."

heard he was going to oppose reciprocity. 'Why?' 'Because I do not believe in it.' 'But you did once.' 'Yes, but conditions have changed.' 'No, it is you who have changed. Your opposition is personal. What is it?' Whatever the reason—patriotic alarm or the desire for an amenable government—Mr. Sifton threw himself wholeheartedly into the reciprocity campaign."

It is difficult to believe that Laurier was as surprised as his statement to his biographer suggests. He must have known that Sifton's views on tariff policy excluded all possibility of reciprocity with the United States. When the Joint High Commission sat in 1898-9 Sifton's concern, lest something in the nature of reciprocal trade relations should emerge, was made known to Laurier in letters which, as their contents reveal, were supplementary to previous conversations. Sifton revealed in these letters a marked apprehension that Canada would be worsted in any deal which could be made. "I am convinced", he said in his letter of November 29th, 1898, "that the Americans will not make the treaty unless it is altogether jug-handled in their favour." He declared himself against Free Trade in coal, flour and wheat, and he wanted no arrangement as to lumber. In one letter he suggested to Sir Wilfrid that it was time to call the conference off. The breaking off of the negotiations and Sir Wilfrid's subsequent declarations of future indifference to any suggestion of closer trade relations with the United States were highly agreeable to him.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>These statements by Sir Wilfrid played a large part in the campaign of 1911, being extensively circulated by the Conservatives. In Parliament in 1899, following the failure of the Joint High Commission, Sir Wilfrid said: "If we know the hearts and minds of our people at present, I think I am not making too wide a statement when I say that the general feeling in Canada is not in favour of reciprocity." After pointing out that there was a time when Canada greatly desired an American market, he added: "We are not dependent on the American market now." In 1903 in proposing to Parliament the Grand Trunk Pacific legislation, Sir Wilfrid said: "I have found, in the short experience during which it has been my privilege and my fortune to be placed at the head of affairs by the



Mr. Sifton never disguised to anybody his objections to reciprocity with the United States. His colleagues must have been familiar with his attitude. In 1901 Mr. Sifton, in a series of interviews with the writer, who was about to take over the editorship of the *Manitoba Free Press*, set out in detail his views on all the big public questions of the day. He was particularly emphatic in declaring that he could see no advantage to Canada in a trade bargain with the United States. He said that his views, adverse to reciprocity, really went back to the campaign of 1891. In that campaign he had represented the Liberals in a series of joint public meetings in Brandon constituency (then known as Selkirk) with T. M. Daly, the Conservative candidate. "I had at that time", he said, "no views of my own on reciprocity. I accepted and advocated the party policy but, as the discussion proceeded, I became more and more doubtful as to the soundness of my position. By the time the campaign was over I was pretty well converted to the view I was supposed to oppose."<sup>1</sup> In December, 1904, follow-

will of the Canadian people, that the best and most effective way to maintain friendship with our American neighbours is to be absolutely independent of them." Speaking to the Imperial Conference in 1907, Laurier remarked: "If we were to follow the laws of nature and geography between Canada and the United States, the whole trade would flow from south to north and from north to south. We have done everything possible by building canals and subsidizing railways, to bring the trade from west to east and from east to west, so as to bring trade into British channels. All this we have done, recognizing the principle of the great advantage of forcing trade within the British Empire. There was a time when we wanted reciprocity with the United States, but our efforts and offers were put aside. We have said good-bye to that trade, and we have now put all our hopes in British trade."

<sup>1</sup>Mr. Sifton repeated this statement to the House of Commons in much the same words in his speech of February 28th, 1911: "Twenty years ago the Liberal party had as its policy the policy of unrestricted reciprocity. As a young man, young in public life at that time, I followed the leaders of my party; I took an active part in that election. There are, I think, some gentlemen in the House here, against whom I spoke in that campaign, and to the best of my ability I endeavoured to convince the electors whom I addressed, that the policy of my party was a wise and prudent policy. I am free to say, Mr. Chairman, that almost before the campaign was over, I had succeeded in convincing myself that we were wrong."

ing the Liberal victory, Mr. Sifton gave an interview to E. W. Thomson, a veteran Canadian newspaper man. This interview was primarily for the *Boston Transcript* but it was reproduced in many Canadian newspapers. It appeared in the *Manitoba Free Press* on December 6th, 1904. This interview is so significant and so conclusive as to Mr. Sifton's attitude that its reproduction in somewhat condensed form is advisable.

The West, Mr. Sifton said, was not a unit in desiring reciprocity in natural products. "Certainly I used to favour such reciprocity; but I am not like some people we both know—I can learn." The availability of any arrangement would depend upon its permanency. Canadians had not forgotten the lesson of 1866. The country had adapted its agricultural production to the American market, and it was flattened out by the abrogation of the treaty. "No more of that. We have adapted our production and business to the independent, self-sufficient policy that has been pursued for many years now. Does anybody of good sense imagine we will give that up, and undertake a re-adaptation to the United States market on a bargain extending over any short term, or which could be done away by a few years' notice from Washington? No."

He was far from sure that the West wanted the American market for its wheat. The existence of a duty promoted flour milling in Canada and hampered it in the United States; why should Canada give much in the way of reciprocity to have this duty taken off? "Our interest is to have the first-class wheat of our West milled in Winnipeg or Rat Portage, instead of Minneapolis. We want to export it as flour, as much as possible. That will give us two profits. . . . It is just as cheap to haul flour to the sea from Winnipeg or the Lake of the Woods, as from Minneapolis. It will be cheaper all the year round pretty soon. I mean as soon as we get our waterways improved to the utmost, and our



almost dead level, first-class National Transcontinental Railway built. That completion is only a few years ahead. So we do not need, and do not much wish to have our wheat growers feeling dependent on Minneapolis prices." There might be a seasonal advantage to Canadian wheat-growers in having early access to the Minneapolis market; but there could be no substantial permanent variation in price, seeing that the world price for wheat was made in Liverpool. The slight gains under reciprocity in natural products were "scarcely worth bothering about, much less binding ourselves for, and especially it is not worth the adapting of our business to a treaty that might be abrogated at short notice." Reciprocity was not in the line of Canadian transportation development. "We have pretty well overcome the difficulties of geography. By the canals and waterways and railways that we have constructed and developed, our commerce flows along lines of latitude, not northward and southward. We are fixed now to deal with Europe, and especially with Great Britain. There is an unlimited market there for pretty much everything we raise."

He doubted whether reciprocity with the United States could consist with the preference to Great Britain. "The only right way to size up the mind of Canada is to consider that we are getting along prosperously and seeking no favours from any quarter, that we do not seem to need any, that our inclination is all to hoe our own row, or paddle our own canoe, that we are a business government for a business people." He concluded by reiteration of the need of permanency. "Don't forget to repeat permanency, permanency, permanency; or the difficulty of securing it. That is the consideration which seems to me most obstructive of reciprocity with neighbours who are as keen as we are getting to believe we are ourselves."

With views so strongly held, so freely avowed, Sir Wilfrid Laurier must have been familiar. It is possible to

assume that Sir Wilfrid did not consult Sifton because he knew that it would be useless, and under the circumstances he may not have considered it advisable. Sir Wilfrid, as has already been pointed out, was somewhat addicted to the habit of confronting his followers with the accomplished fact. The Laurier Government made the reciprocity agreement and submitted it to Parliament in the firm belief that a bargain which reproduced in essentials the conditions of the old reciprocity treaty of 1854, would command such overwhelming public support, non-partisan in character, that no effective opposition could be organized. They expected the arrangement to go over with a chorus of approval which would drown out the odd note of criticism.

In this expectation they were not so far wrong. The political opposition to reciprocity took a long time to develop. It was not until after repeated caucuses that the Conservative Parliamentary party decided that it would be wise for them to come out openly against the pact. They needed to be convinced by manifestations outside of Parliament that there was a body of hostile opinion which, if organized, would be sufficiently formidable to threaten the life of the government. The credit or the reverse of setting in motion powers which ultimately destroyed the pact must go to parties and interests which, for reasons having nothing to do with party ambitions, took the field against it. First of these assailants, in point of time, and ultimately in influence was Clifford Sifton.

## II

The making of the reciprocity pact was the result of a peculiar conjunction of circumstances. Though the conditions were different in each country, this arrangement seemed to offer a way of escape from domestic difficulties to the Governments both of Canada and the United States. The two Governments were brought into contact in March,



1910, by a meeting between President Taft and Mr. Fielding, Minister of Finance for Canada, at Albany. This meeting was the result of a desire by the United States Government to make an arrangement by which it would be relieved from the necessity of applying the maximum schedules of the Payne-Aldrich tariff to Canada—this desire arising not out of regard for Canada but from apprehensions as to the political effects of a tariff war with Canada which threatened.<sup>1</sup> The revulsion of feeling in the United States against the excesses of the Payne-Aldrich measure was already in evidence, foreshadowing the coming in of the Democrats at the forthcoming congressional elections. A nominal adjustment of the Canadian tariff enabled the United States Government to continue the general tariff against Canada. The public discussion to which these difficulties gave rise brought forth an expression of public opinion in the United States favourable to better relations with Canada which in part took the form of Democratic victories in congressional by-elections. In Canada in the summer of 1910 Laurier, in a tour of the western provinces, met with a determined organized demand from the farmers for further substantial cuts in the tariff. The Canadian Government seized with eagerness the opening that was given by this change in the mood of the American people, and the evident willingness of President Taft to shape his policy in keeping with this shift in opinion. They saw in a reciprocity pact an opportunity to placate the rebellious low-tariff elements without endangering the truce which in fact, if not in terms,

<sup>1</sup>By the Payne-Aldrich Act, the United States was fitted with a general tariff and a maximum tariff higher by an additional duty of 25 per cent. on all goods, including those on the free list. The law made it compulsory on the Secretary of State to apply the higher duties before April 1st, 1910, against any country that did not admit imports from the United States at the low rates of duty charged against the goods of any other country, even though these might be the result of special arrangements. The demand in certain cases was therefore for gratuitous favours for which considerations were not given. Canada, of all the nations, was most resolute in refusing to be intimidated by this club-swinging.

had existed between them and the manufacturing and business interests for fourteen years.

In October negotiations between Canada and the United States were begun; on the opening of Parliament in November the government gave notice in the Speech from the Throne that negotiations were going forward and that results might be expected. The government was encouraged to hope that "at an early day, without any sacrifice of Canadian interests, an arrangement may be made which will admit many of the products of the Dominion into the United States on more favourable terms." In December a delegation of farmers organized by the National Council of Agriculture, of which E. C. Drury, later Premier of Ontario, was secretary, waited upon the Dominion Government and asked, among other things, for a reduction in the tariff rates, and for enlarged trade relations with the United States. The memorial presented to the government asked for reciprocal free trade between the two countries in natural products, and a considerable list of other articles and manufactures. The farmers asked that if an agreement were reached, it should be given effect to, not by "the hard and fast requirements of a treaty" but by independent action by the respective governments. In January Mr. Fielding and Mr. William Paterson, Minister of Customs, proceeded to Washington to complete the arrangements. Meanwhile the Democrats had captured Congress in the November elections, a circumstance which further predisposed the Republican administration towards securing a general reduction in the tariff by means of a reciprocal trade arrangement with Canada.

These developments were not lost upon Mr. Sifton. With his gift of political clairvoyance he saw in the meeting of Mr. Taft and Mr. Fielding in March, 1910, the forerunner of a probable reciprocal trade arrangement. The insulation between him and the government must have been complete if they did not know that he was watchful and



alarmed, for he spoke his mind freely in his private and immediate circle. In January, 1911, while the negotiations were going on at Washington, he, in his capacity as Chairman of the Commission of Conservation, gave public expression to his fears. At London, speaking to the Canadian Club on January 5th, he declared that the policies of timber conservation which the Commission was working out would not be possible if a reciprocal arrangement was entered into with the United States; and at Montreal four days later he was still more outspoken. If there was reciprocity with the United States "must not our trade, our business, our very life, become intermingled so that we shall become dependent on them? What must follow in the natural course of events but political union?" This was the first definite note of critical opposition to the expected arrangement—with one notable exception. A rather remarkable forecast of the objections which were to be preferred to reciprocity was made in November by Sir George Ross, Liberal ex-Premier of Ontario.<sup>1</sup>

When the terms of the agreement were made public on January 26th, its scope astonished the public. It was, making allowance for changed conditions, the treaty of 1854 over again. There was complete free trade in the natural products of the farm: in grain, fruits, vegetables, farm animals. Natural products in their secondary form—meats, canned goods, flour, biscuits, pickles, etc., were exchangeable at low rates of duty; and there was also a low rate of duties on a variety of articles, including agricultural implements and engines, building material, partly finished lumber, etc. It was provided that pulpwood would be admitted free by the United States when the provinces withdrew their embargo on the export of pulpwood cut from government-owned lands. The arrangement was by concurrent legislation, not by treaty enactment. The Canadian negotiators

<sup>1</sup>See *Canadian Annual Review* for 1911, page 34.

made this stipulation in the belief that it would be acceptable to Canadian public opinion—a serious mistake in judgment as events proved.

The immediate reaction in Parliament and the country to the announcement was strongly favourable. It is beyond question that if, upon the first sign of organized opposition, the government had dissolved Parliament, it would have been triumphantly returned by the electors; but it saw no difficulty in getting the arrangement ratified by Parliament, and it believed that it would lose nothing by permitting it to operate for a year or so, before appealing to the people. This decision was in its consequences fatal both to the pact and to the government. Nothing more clearly showed the absence of Sifton from the government councils than the manner in which Laurier allowed matters to drift until a favourable situation became hopeless, whereas the vigorous pushing of an initial advantage and the prompt acceptance of the challenge would have been unquestionably rewarded by victory. Where the government particularly erred in judgment was its placid confidence in its ability to get the pact ratified after a show of opposition in Parliament. It expected the act to pass by April. It should have been clear to it, once it became evident that the opposition was serious, that, at all hazards, the pact would not be permitted to be put to the test before an election. Laurier's known refusal to adopt the closure put the weapon of obstruction into the hands of his opponents.

The opposition of Mr. Sifton to the pact became known immediately, though he did not publicly state his objections until a month had elapsed. In the meantime, the opposition outside of Parliament had become organized and formidable. Business sentiment in Toronto and Montreal was instinctively hostile, and business sentiment in smaller circles followed the lead thus given. Resolutions against the arrangement were passed by the Boards of Trade of Toronto



and Montreal, by the associated Boards of Trade of Ontario, and by a large number of similar smaller organizations. Delegations of fruit-growers and meat-packers registered their protests. The millers' organizations objected to their rivals in the United States having free access to sources of supply in Canada. On February 20th, eighteen prominent citizens of Toronto, some of them active Liberals, others having only a nominal connection with the party, issued a statement in which they opposed the arrangement at every point. On February 22nd, Sir William Van Horne, speaking in fact though not officially for the powerful Canadian Pacific Railway, sounded a clarion note by declaring that he "was out to bust the damned thing." This movement was powerfully reinforced by the speech in Parliament in which on February 28th, Clifford Sifton declared his opposition. The speech was a completely frank expression of what was in his mind. It provided a quarry yielding rich material for opposition literature; and became a model for scores of campaign speeches. The speech as a whole exemplified the tariff convictions which, as has been noted in this book, he had been acquiring ever since he came to grips with the question upon his acceptance of office in the Dominion Government in 1896.

Mr. Sifton denied that both parties or that one party had been in favour of reciprocity for forty years. The Liberals had been in favour, but he claimed they had abandoned this position upon the failure of the High Commission in 1898-99. In the three succeeding elections there had been no suggestion that the government favoured or would seek reciprocity. It had no mandate to reverse the country's fiscal policy, which had been discussed, debated and approved in three general elections, "without any consultation and practically without the knowledge of the public." This course was not constitutional; it was a dangerous innovation. He then proceeded to define what, in his opinion, the fiscal

policy, thus settled and approved, was. The tariff of 1897 had reduced duties on implements and raw materials, and had embodied a preference for British goods. Nevertheless, it continued the system of protection. "The tariff of 1897", he said, "did not fully implement all the promises or the suggestions which we, the members of the Liberal party, had made in regard to our future policy." But they had submitted the tariff thus made as the best possible under the circumstances, and it had been thrice approved by the electors. He was thoroughly and completely convinced that the tariff, embodying the principle of moderate protection, was one which it would be unwise and unsafe radically to change.

Accompanying this definition of policy was a declaration of his personal views. He admitted that these views had undergone a gradual but steady and certain change. He thoroughly accepted the tariff of 1897. Since 1898 his convictions as to the undesirability of a reciprocity arrangement with the United States had been steadily strengthening. He wanted the House and the country to realize that "my opinion on this subject is not a spasmodic or suddenly formed opinion, but is the mature conviction which comes to me as the result of something over twenty years of pretty close contact with the affairs of Canada." He believed in the desirability of party allegiance as an assurance of stable government; but there were occasions when obedience should not be rendered. "When one's party is led to apply principles which are of fundamental and far-reaching importance, affecting the whole national structure, and one feels that he cannot conscientiously follow those principles, then, Mr. Chairman, his party allegiance is necessarily dissolved, and if he desires to retain his own self-respect it becomes absolutely necessary for him to decline to follow that of which he does not approve. That is the position in which I find myself to-day; and however painful the process



must be, I take the only course which I can take and retain my self-respect."

He then entered upon a detailed examination and criticism of the arrangement. Taking down the bars would injure many Canadian industries. Canadian meat-packing could not stand against the American Meat Trust; Canadian millers would be seriously injured by the competition of American mills; fruit and vegetable growing in Canada would be prejudiced. The movement of United States capital to Canada for the erection of branch factories would be checked. Under the arrangement there would be a constant and illegitimate pressure upon the provinces of Ontario and Quebec, to force them to withdraw their regulations against the exportation of pulpwood. He denied that there was any real advantage in obtaining access to the United States markets. We were giving up markets in Great Britain and abandoning the facilities developed for getting our produce there; and instead relying upon and making ourselves dependent upon the United States market. How long would it remain open? There were dozens of things which might cause irritation, leading to the destruction of the pact. Then, having already lost one market, we should lose the other. "Sir, we are putting our head in the noose." There was no ultimate advantage in having the United States market for Canadian wheat. In the long run the average price paid to Canadian growers would be less. Canadian grain going *via* American channels would lose its grades.

Against this he pictured the future if Canadian farmers remained content with the markets they already had. By keeping the growing volume of Canadian wheat flowing through Canadian channels, it would be possible, with the improvement in the roads and canals, to reduce transportation charges by six cents per bushel. As for cattle, reciprocity would make it possible for the United States interests to capture and control all the cattle of the North-west—their

last hoof would be controlled from Chicago. "The best years of my life have been given to the settlement of that country. I cannot tell you how I feel about that great country being made the backyard for the city of Chicago." Canada should establish a chilled meat industry which would result in a duplication in the Canadian west of the stockyards and packing plants of Kansas City, Omaha and Chicago. The pact would operate against the national transportation policy. Why had they spent millions to build railways on Canadian soil, if it made no difference whether or not traffic went through Canadian channels? The United States favoured the pact; the Milling Trust wanted to get Canadian wheat; the Meat Trust desired to get free meat; New York was in favour of reciprocity because it feared the growing power of Montreal as a port of export. The New England States supported the arrangement because they hoped to get for their own channels the great trade which was building up Montreal on the St. Lawrence route. "But can anybody in the world tell why a Canadian, devoted to the interests of Canada, should support the arrangement which we have here?" The pact meant the domination of Canada by the United States; it showed in fact that the domination had already come. For thirty years the United States had had nothing to say to Canadians, but "when we have finally, definitely won our independence and put ourselves in a position to be perfectly independent," they had shaken a club and the agreement was the result. If Canadians accepted the terms they would pay the price.

He closed with this recapitulation of his reasons for resisting the ratification of the agreement. "Sir, I oppose these resolutions because in my judgment they reverse the great and successful policy under which the people of Canada, fighting against poverty, against natural obstacles, against geographical conditions, have made of their country one of the most enviable in the world. These resolutions,



in my judgment, spell retrogression, commercial subordination, the destruction of our national ideals, and displacement from our proud position as the rising hope of the British Empire."

### III

It is hardly within the purview of this book to deal in detail with the battle for reciprocity which ended in the defeat of the government in the general election of September 21st, 1911. The discussion continued in the House of Commons until an adjournment was taken to permit the attendance of Sir Wilfrid Laurier at the Imperial Conference; was carried on throughout the country intermittently during his absence; was resumed with fervour upon the reassembling of Parliament; and following the dissolution the issue was carried to the people in a campaign of tremendous vigour. Once the Conservative party made the definite decision to fight the proposition, it took the position that the matter should be taken to the people for judgment; and in order to force dissolution it resorted to open obstruction. The government, not less confident than the opposition, was equally ready to take the judgment of the people, and dissolution followed promptly upon the reassembling of Parliament in July.

Mr. Sifton's case against the reciprocity pact has been given in outline; but it is not to be assumed that there was not an argument on the other side. The contention in Canada that the arrangement was wholly favourable to the United States was answered somewhat effectively by the corresponding campaign in the United States, which was directed towards proving that Canada had the best of the bargain and would capture extensive markets to the ruin of many United States industries.

The incident showed conclusively that countries in which the spirit of economic nationalism is strong cannot enter into trade arrangements involving mutual concessions. There

is, in fact, no ground upon which they can meet. This point is illustrated by two definitions of reciprocity appearing in the American *Economist*, which, as an advocate of high protection, was bitterly hostile to the agreement. Reciprocity was defined by it as "a sharp bargain between sharp bargainers, one or the other of whom is certain to get the best of the bargain." The actual arrangement was described as "a dishonest scheme contrived by selfish men whereby one producing interest is sacrificed for the benefit of some other producing interest." To get the pact agreed to by both countries it would have been necessary for its protagonists in each country to convince its own public that the other party to the deal had been thoroughly "trimmed", in the colloquial use of that word.

The Liberal campaign to this end was badly conceived, and it proved wholly ineffective. It could not get itself heard amidst the tremendous opposing barrage put down by the heavily shotted guns of the opposition. The advocates of the arrangement in the United States made a superbly successful job of convincing the American public that they had taken Canada into camp; but the very success of their arguments destroyed the Liberal case in Canada. They succeeded in getting the pact ratified by the United States Congress, despite the resistance of protectionist influences; but this fact in itself was potent in helping to bring about the rejection of the arrangement by Canada. If the United States wanted it that was a good reason for its rejection by Canada.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Among the most notable campaigners for the opposition in Canada, were President Taft and the Honourable Champ Clark, speaker of the United States House of Representatives. On two occasions President Taft spoke of Canada being at the parting of the ways, meaning that if the United States did not seize the chance of closer commercial relations, it was probable that Canada would enter into closer preferential relations with Great Britain and the other British nations, in keeping with the Chamberlain scheme of Imperial consolidation which was being advocated at that time. Addressing the newspaper men of the United States on April 27th



In the anti-reciprocity campaign, Mr. Sifton played a conspicuous part. From the time of his speech in Parliament—if indeed his activities did not date from an earlier period—he was in the midst of the battle. He was temperamentally unable to take part in a contest without throwing into it all his powers of mind and body. To fight was to win, if this were humanly possible. Immediately following his deliverance in Parliament he addressed audiences in Hamilton and Montreal. His speech in the Commons made a deep, and indeed sensational, impression upon the country. It was rapturously received by the Conservative opposition. Notwithstanding the past, they would have gladly welcomed Mr. Sifton as a recruit to their party. This not being possible—he intimated at an early date that he could not take a parliamentary nomination from them—they were very pleased to have his co-operation. One who was closely associated with him in succeeding months, writes of these times:

“Sifton’s declaration in the Commons against the pact was the loveliest music the Conservatives had heard for many moons. They had mercilessly assailed him as Minister of the Interior, even after he had left the Government. They would gladly have hailed him as a potential Moses. He knew too much to be hampered by that snare, which they thought was a compliment—as, indeed, it was.

the President said: “Unless it is now decided favourable to reciprocity it is exceedingly probable that no such opportunity will ever again come to the United States. The forces which are at work in England and Canada to separate her by a Chinese wall from the United States, and to make her part of an Imperial band reaching from England around the world and back to England again by a system of preferential tariffs, would derive an impetus from the rejection of this treaty; and if we have reciprocity with all the advantages that I have described and that I earnestly and sincerely believe will follow its adoption, we must take it now or give it up for ever.”

The Honourable Champ Clark in a speech at Chicago, of which much use was made, reiterated these arguments, and went on to make the observation that he was for reciprocity because he hoped there would come a day when the British possessions in North America would become part of the American Republic. These and similar statements by less prominent American public men were used in Canada with deadly effect by opponents of the reciprocity agreement.

"During a somewhat extensive experience nothing has ever been more truly intriguing than to watch the Borden strategists, as they discussed prospects with their old adversary. You have sometimes seen the silent, luminously wistful tribute of the confiding eye when the mouth is still. The truth was that the Conservative party, as then at Ottawa half-embattled, was without the tradition, as it had been without the hope of victory until Liberals rebelled, where the Conservatives at first had feared to denounce."<sup>1</sup>

Many organizations, other than those identified with the Conservative party, came into being to take a hand in the struggle. Among these were the Canadian National League, an outcome of the protest of eighteen Liberals, under the chairmanship of Z. A. Lash; an anti-reciprocity league which booked non-party speakers, under the auspices of which many of Sifton's public addresses were delivered; and the appeal to the British-born organized as a side-line by Arthur Hawkes, under the general direction of the Canadian National League of which he was secretary. Mr. Sifton was not openly identified with any of these organizations but he was active in them all; and though it is not a matter of record it can be said that he gave the Conservative Board of Strategy the benefit of his advice, particularly in regard to Ontario, a political terrain which he knew intimately by reason of his intensive study of it prior to the election of 1908.

One of the most widely circulated pieces of anti-reciprocity literature was his speech in Parliament, fitted out with a foreword and an afterword. Western Canada was literally sown with this pamphlet. His foreword was largely directed towards influencing the western farmers. In it he set out the West's four great needs: 1. The construction and operation of the Hudson Bay Railway by the government: 2. The establishment of a commission to control the grading and transportation of wheat: 3. The establishment of a

<sup>1</sup>Arthur Hawkes in *Manitoba Free Press*, September 21st, 1929.



sample wheat market: 4. Development of a steady and reliable market for animal products, by the establishment of chilled meat industries and the extension of meat packing industries. Policies applying these needs would, he declared, build up the western cities, thus creating an extensive home market. "Winnipeg," he wrote, "should in fifteen years have in and around 500,000 people; other towns and cities should grow in proportion." Upon the dissolution of Parliament, Mr. Sifton issued a manifesto to the people of Canada in which he restated, in compact form, his objections to reciprocity. He also addressed a letter of farewell to the Liberal Association of the electoral district of Brandon. In it he expressed his deep, heartfelt and sincere appreciation of their loyal support for 23 years. After giving in brief his reasons for opposing the government, he added:

"The principle involved is much more important than the continuance in power, or even the existence of any party. It is a question which goes to the root of our national life and development. Holding this opinion it is obvious that no principle of party loyalty could be enough to guide my action, and it became my plain duty to act upon my convictions and to offer the strongest possible resistance to the ratification of the treaty."

While Laurier was in attendance at the Imperial Conference, Sifton also was in London with his family, on holiday. There were contacts between the two men through an intermediary, W. T. R. Preston. In his book of reminiscences *My Generation of Politics and Politicians*, Preston says that Laurier permitted him to convey the intimation to Sifton that he was considering dissolution, and that Sifton returned the courtesy by advising him not to submit himself and his cause at that time to the electors. This must have been an act of private friendliness, for Sifton's public position was that it was the duty of the government to submit

the pact to the electors. Mr. Sifton returned to Canada in July and was thereafter continuously engaged in campaigning until election day. The territory covered in his speaking ran from Windsor to Halifax. Most of these speeches followed the general lines of his parliamentary address, but an additional argument which was developed with great skill and effectiveness by himself and other critics had to do with the fact that Canada, under the favoured nation clauses of British commercial treaties, had to extend the trade privileges given to the United States to twelve other nations including Argentina, Russia, Australia, Denmark. The possibility if not the certainty of these countries deluging Canada with agricultural products was presented in vivid terms to Canadian agriculturists, and with evident effect.<sup>1</sup>

The verdict on September 21st, was most emphatic. The sum of all the arguments was effective in convincing a sufficient proportion of the Canadian electors that the change was not desirable. The Conservatives came into power by a majority of forty-five, which was almost equal to the Liberal majority in the preceding Parliament.<sup>2</sup> Even with such an issue as reciprocity in the balance a general election is, however, never a referendum. Other issues, minor and sectional, aided in the overthrow, particularly the nationalist campaign in Quebec, directed by Henri Bourassa against the Government's naval policy, and an unscrupulous stirring

<sup>1</sup>A cartoon extensively used during the campaign showed a long line of carriers bringing produce to Canada's markets. First in the procession was Uncle Sam with a wheel-barrow. Then followed Australia carrying packages marked "Australian produce" and "Chilled beef and mutton." Then came Argentina, with the other nations following in the procession.

<sup>2</sup>The popular majority was comparatively small, the relative figures being:—Conservatives 669,567, Liberals 625,096, Independents 12,865; but, in keeping with our electoral system, a small popular majority distributed over a large number of constituencies produced a measure of political strength in Parliament, out of proportion with the actual political strength of the respective parties in the country.



up of Protestant feeling in Ontario.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless the verdict was decisive as against reciprocity. As to the particular argument that was most effective in leading Canadians to reject the proposition that ten years earlier would have been accepted with joyful acclamation, there is ground for difference of opinion. There are those who think Dr. Skelton was pretty near the mark when he said: "Perhaps the determining factor with the man in the street was the conviction that at last he was sufficiently prosperous to be able to sacrifice further gain for himself—or for his neighbour—in order to show his resentment of long years of United States hostility and condescension."<sup>2</sup>

Canada rejected reciprocity in pride rather than in fear. The Canadians felt that the United States had refused to give them their markets when they needed them. In their strength, actual or potential, they proposed to show the United States they could get along without them. Whether the decision was right or wrong, prudent or rash, vain-glorious or self-regarding, it settled for a generation and perhaps for a century all possibility of a mutual agreement for freedom of exchange in trade between these two countries. It is impossible to imagine a recurrence of the favourable conditions which made such an arrangement seem practicable in 1911. When the arrangement fell through, the countries elected for economic war. This consequence was

<sup>1</sup>In keeping with the custom of charging everything up to Sifton, Dr. Skelton in his *Life and Letters of Sir Wilfrid Laurier*, says that he "organized the No-Popery cry on the back concessions of Ontario." To this Sir John Willison, in his *Life of Laurier* makes denial, and with authority of Sifton's contribution to this campaign Willison says (*Sir Wilfrid Laurier and the Liberal Party*, Vol. II, page 397): "In Parliament and throughout the electoral contest, Sifton spoke with dignity and restraint. There was no temper, no demagogic denunciation, no argument which was not rooted in national and economic considerations. Whether one accepts or rejects his conclusions it is to be admitted no more effective speeches ever were delivered in Canada. There was strength in their moderation, and freedom from any attempt to excite emotions or inflame prejudices."

<sup>2</sup>*Canada and its Provinces*, Volume IX, page 202.

obscured for a time by the Democratic interregnum in the United States, when Canada received under the Underwood tariff many of the advantages which were sought by the reciprocity arrangement. But with the coming of the high emergency tariff of 1920, a state of economic tension between the two countries was established, which has become progressively greater with the passing years.

#### IV

About the soundness of Mr. Sifton's reasons for opposing reciprocity there may be now, as in 1911, room for diversity of opinion; but there can be no question about the sincerity of the motives which inspired his course. His action at the time was so disconcerting to the Liberals that, as was perhaps inevitable, there were those who, under the impulse of anger, disappointment and fear, tried to minimize the effect of his disagreement with the government by the imputation of motives of ambition and self-interest; as for instance, that he had been seeking a pretext for breaking with the Liberals, who were plainly approaching the end of their term, in order that he might establish himself influentially in the dominant Conservative party. If there were any who believed this and other equally mean-spirited attempts to explain his action, they were disabused by events. Mr. Sifton could serve no self-interest, no ambition by the course he took; the consequences, as he very well knew at the time, were the breaking of old ties without the making of new ones, and his retirement into a position of political isolation from which he never afterwards wholly emerged. The strength of his feeling in the matter overbore the counsels of practically all those who by the ties of blood or by long and intimate association were justified in tendering him advice.

Mr. Sifton, like all men who are blessed with enemies, had the compensating power of attaching men to him by



hoops of steel. There was in being what might be truly termed a Sifton "phalanx" made up of men closely united to him by the bonds of personal affection, and by a political companionship which went back to the early days of his political career. Not the least astonishing feature of this remarkable political episode was that, so far as the writer's knowledge goes, not one of these men followed Sifton in his opposition to the reciprocity agreement. In no case did the disagreement sever personal relations, and destiny was to bring them all together again, before many years, in a great common cause; but for the moment the divergence was absolute. From many of these friends Sifton got identical advice: if he felt that he could not keep silence, why should he not make a clear statement of his objections to the arrangement in Parliament, and thereafter maintain that aloofness from politics which he had announced would be his attitude when he accepted the chairmanship of the Commission of Conservation? To all such advice Sifton made answer that the issue seemed to him so vital that, whatever the consequences might be to himself, he must resist the acceptance of the arrangement to the limit of his power. Notwithstanding popular ideas to the contrary, Mr. Sifton was a man of warm human feelings, usually intent on keeping his friendships in repair; and he would never have taken a course in which he did not carry the support and confidence of his more intimate friends, if it had not been with him a matter of inescapable obligation. To one of his dissenting friends he wrote immediately after he had made his speech in Parliament: "For myself, if I never made another speech, or gave another vote, or sat in another representative assembly, I should have taken the course that I did."

But if Mr. Sifton did not carry his immediate circle of friends with him he had greater success with the great masses of Liberal electors. By many of these he was regarded as,

after Laurier, the outstanding man of the party: and when he summoned them to forget, for the time, their party allegiance in the interests of the country, they by the thousands answered the call. It was Sir Wilfrid Laurier's opinion, to which he gave public expression upon at least one occasion, that it was not Borden or the Conservative party that really defeated him in 1911, but Clifford Sifton. Laurier, who was a man of singularly magnanimous mind, understood and appreciated Sifton's course; and no great period of time elapsed following the Liberal defeat before the two men were on relations of reasonable friendliness. More than this, Sir Wilfrid defended the right of Mr. Sifton to exercise his own judgment to members of his party who were in favour of declaring a blood-feud with their former associate. Joseph Martin, who had himself been outside the party traces on more than one occasion, attacked Sifton, with whom he had long been at outs, in a public speech in which he said that "Clifford Sifton does not stand very high in the estimation of Sir Wilfrid Laurier." Whereupon Laurier wrote him in these terms: "To this I must take strong exception. Sifton is a very able man. He seceded from me in 1911; in this he did just as you did, who seceded from me on this occasion and many others. But I bear no resentment to anybody for following their own judgment and their own inclination and, therefore, disabuse your mind of the belief that I have any resentment against Sifton. Should he come back to the party I would be ready to co-operate with him, as I well know his great force and ability."

Mr. Sifton's tariff views, as they had been shaping themselves over many years, were at this time definitely protectionist; and to this fact is to be attributed much of his hostility to reciprocity. He, however, always qualified the protection in which he believed by describing it as "moderate". Writing immediately after the election of 1911 he said to a friend that it would be hopeless for anybody to



challenge the national fiscal policy, approved by the election, "provided the new government has the sense to maintain the present position and not attempt to increase the protection." "There is", he said in another letter of this period, "absolutely no future for any policy in Canada except that of moderate protection."

The trade and railway developments of the two or three following years were of a nature somewhat to discount the high expectations of ever-expanding prosperity which had been a factor in inducing the rejection of reciprocity; but in November, 1914, Mr. Sifton was still strong in the faith that a fiscal policy of economic nationalism best served the interests of Canada. Speaking on November 27th, 1914, at a banquet of the Canadian Manufacturers' Association at Toronto, he declared his belief in a policy of moderate protection for Canada. "I do not believe," he added, "in protection that is unfair to the consumer but just sufficient to enable the Canadian manufacturer, by exercising the greatest amount of diligence and capacity to hold his market against foreign competitors, including Great Britain. For Great Britain, with her policy of developing commerce, free trade had been absolutely necessary; but the position of Canada, with her illimitable natural resources was quite different. Her duty ought to be to develop her resources by manufacturing, her policy being to provide for home consumption." He pointed out, however, that in certain lines, as in pulp and paper, nickel and lead, Canada was able to supply the world, and in these he felt she should try to capture her share of the world's markets. These statements are significant as showing that his belief in protection was not doctrinal. He simply believed that this policy, under the conditions prevailing in Canada, would achieve certain ends which he thought desirable; hence his support.

In his later years Sifton sometimes referred to the part he played in defeating reciprocity; but it was not a favour-

ite subject of conversation with him. When he did speak of it, it was to stress the point that it was the impermanency of the arrangement that was particularly obnoxious to him; and in the last conversation the writer had with him, six weeks before his death, he reverted to this subject. He might, he said, have brought himself to accept the arrangement if there had been binding provisions ensuring its continuance for a lengthy period of years; but with each party free to terminate the pact at will it would, in his opinion, have been madness for Canada to put herself in a position of dependence on the United States market. There are occasional brief references in his letters to his reasons for fighting reciprocity. Thus under date of December 22nd, 1920, he wrote:

“There is nothing in any Canadian political party basing its fortunes on a policy which Canada does not control. I have been through it backwards and forwards. The practical certainty of a movement of this kind (referring to the high-protectionist emergency tariff measure then before the United States Congress) was one of my main reasons for opposing reciprocity. As soon as we get settled down with our banking, transportation and business connections adapted to reciprocity, something will happen to the United States; a wave of feeling will flow over the country and they will repeal the whole thing. There is only one policy for Canada and that is to stand on its own legs like any other country.”

Four years later, writing to the same correspondent, he said: “I suppose you know that my main reason for being opposed to the reciprocity pact was that I knew very well that it would not hold, and that just as soon as either political party (in the United States) thought it was to its interest to put a tariff on our goods, they would do so—pact or no pact. Nothing would hold them but a definite treaty.”



## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### CANADA AND THE WAR—UNION GOVERNMENT

"The Safety of the Commonwealth is the Supreme Law."

THE victory of September 21st was not a surprise to Clifford Sifton; with that prophetic political eye that never failed him he had foreseen it months before. Within a month of the submission of the arrangement to Parliament he made the prediction that it would never go on the Statute Book. Arthur Hawkes records that in July Sifton said to him that it would be "1878 over again".<sup>1</sup> Three weeks before the election he gave to a western friend, who was very sure that the Liberals would win, an itemized prediction by provinces which varied, in very slight measure, from the actual results. Two days before the election in a public forecast he said the result was not in doubt; in Ontario there was not a single seat safe for the government. The triumph at the polls was grateful to him. It served no ambition of his but it vindicated his judgment, and it saved the country from policies which he believed were opposed to its interests. Following the election he gave out a brief statement in which he said:

"The Liberal government, no doubt honestly desiring to promote the best interests of the country, made a monumental mistake in proposing to entangle us with the United States and expose our resources to improvident exploitation. The government failed to grasp the idea that its proposal was a direct reversal of the policy of forty years, and a signal for the disintegration of the British Empire. Remon-

<sup>1</sup>*Manitoba Free Press*, September 21st, 1929.

strance and advice proving to be useless, thousands of Liberals were forced, in defence of their national ideals, to join with the Conservatives. In the result we may be assured that no government is ever likely again to make the same mistake, and the national development of Canada along British lines will go on."

For Mr. Sifton there was the word or two of warm praise by those who had found his assistance valuable in attaining victory. Mr. Borden, reaching power after eleven years of travail, wired him: "Your own splendid efforts contributed in no small measure to the result." Conservative newspapers were complimentary. "His presentation of the reciprocity bargain", said the *Ottawa Journal*, "was the most masterly condemnation, barring none, pronounced against it." It commended his independence of spirit and added:

"That was no new departure for him. Public memory ran back a few years to a time when Mr. Sifton renounced the brightest political prospects which Canada afforded, rather than consent to a policy contrary to his convictions. . . . Thousands of the best Liberals in the Dominion followed his inspiring example in subordinating party predilection to the transcendent issues which his clear-visioned intellect saw to be involved."

The victors, greatly rejoicing, moved on to take possession of their kingdom while their ally, his work done, turned aside at the entrance door and took the lonely path to the wilderness. Sifton was too much the political realist to have any doubts as to the consequences to himself of the course he had taken. By it he suffered no loss in personal influence; that indeed was greatly extended by this proof of his independence and his power. But his power in the future must, he recognized, be exercised as an individual, and not in conjunction with a political organization—a lonely business for one who for twenty years had ridden at the head of an army.



Not but what the Liberals would have been glad to have him back pretty much on his own terms. It was only a little over a year later that overtures were made to him to ally himself with the Liberals in opposition to the naval policy submitted to Parliament by the Borden government. The government's following was not in agreement upon the question of the proper naval policy for Canada. The party had agreed in 1909 with the Laurier government that there should be a Canadian navy; but in the 1911 election opposition candidates with the most diverse views on this matter stood for election. In Quebec, hostility to any kind of a Canadian navy or contribution to an Imperial navy was skillfully exploited, mostly by "Nationalist" candidates, to the injury of the Laurier government; in Ontario and the Maritimes, denunciation of Laurier's "tin-pot navy", accompanied by fervid declaration of a desire to strengthen the British naval power with Canadian reinforcements, had proved a good vote-getter. On this question the Borden government was in difficulties from the start, since included in its membership were representatives of the Quebec "Nationalists"; and after a year of consideration it brought in a policy which straddled the problem. By this plan Canada was to spend thirty-five million dollars in paying for three battleships, which were "to range themselves in the battle-line of the Empire." This was to meet an "emergency"; but it was not to be regarded as the solution of a permanent question. That was to come later. If in reaching a permanent solution Canada should decide to have a navy of her own, these ships would be recalled. But Mr. Borden threw cold water on the Canadian navy idea. "Nothing of an efficient character could be built up in a quarter or half a century. Was there any need for this costly or hazardous experiment?"

The Liberals, after some preliminary sparring, reached the bold decision to adopt the tactics which the Conservatives had found so effective in fighting reciprocity. They

decided to oppose the policy outright; to obstruct the passage of the measure through parliament; and to force a general election on the issue. They probably would not have had courage to resolve on this course had there not been a marked change for the worse in the economic conditions of the country. The "wonderful prosperity" of 1911, which could only be continued—according to the appeal successfully made to the electors—by replacing the Liberals who proposed to tamper with it by the Conservatives by whom it would be safeguarded and extended, collapsed with painful suddenness within a year of the change of government. With the first pressure of a world-wide depression Canadian prosperity, which represented largely speculation and extravagance based upon railway and city building programmes financed by lavish borrowings, collapsed like a house of cards. The Liberals burned to turn the tables on their opponents by drawing a contrast between the boastings of 1911 and the realities of 1913. With hard times and a rousing "Canada First" cry on the navy, the Liberals believed that if they could force an election they could turn out the government—especially if, on the navy question, they could enlist Sifton's aid.

Mr. Sifton was in England, vainly seeking relief from his growing physical disability—deafness; and a prominent Liberal member, long an intimate friend, undertook to sound him as to the possibility of the party coming to terms with him—presumably with Laurier's knowledge and approval. In a series of letters, he stated the alternative programme and made the suggestion that Sifton should join with the Liberals in the election that was expected. There was no beating about the bush in the proposition that was submitted: "There is only one ground for uncertainty in this contest. If you can see your way clear to join us as Sir Wilfrid's 'right bower' it means giving confidence to the manufacturing, financial and railroading interests that



nothing radical will be done. In addition to that, with your organizing ability and the hold you have on the people of Ontario, it would mean our winning a large number of seats there. . . . Every man in the party here would welcome you back, and you have the reversion of the premiership in your grasp."

The prospect, however, made no appeal to Sifton, though he made no secret of his disapproval of the Borden scheme. His strong feeling of Nationalism showed itself anew on this question. Writing to a Canadian correspondent he said:

"I cannot make Borden's policy out at all. There is no permanent Canadian policy. He is simply giving three battleships to be built and manned in England, and apparently maintained by England. The idea of giving up the whole policy to adopt simply a gift of three ships to be built in England is simply preposterous. I do not want to see Canada under the heel of the Americans, but I wish just as little to see her give up her right to a complete national development. The same principles which made me resist reciprocity cause me to resist this lying-down policy which has apparently been adopted by Borden."<sup>1</sup>

Laurier's policy, he went on to say, was much better, but it needed amendment. It ought to provide for effective coast defences coupled on each coast with a small but effective fleet of destroyers, with perhaps one cruiser. If this were done it would be proper for Canada to build and equip two battleships (with Canadian crews apart from officers) to be controlled for the time being by the Admiralty. "It is all right", he said, "for the smaller vessels to be stationed on our coasts as auxiliaries to the coast defence—for police and defence purposes, etc., and as a nursery for officers

<sup>1</sup>The Liberal policy, as set forth in amendments submitted to Parliament, re-affirmed the 1909 policy of a Canadian navy and called for the immediate building of two fleet units—one for each Canadian coast.



*From a painting by Wyly Grier*

SIR CLIFFORD SIFTON

In hunting pink, as he often appeared in the leading hunts  
of England, Canada and the United States





and men; but tactically it is nonsense to think of keeping the battleships there."

The Liberal plan of forcing an election miscarried. Mr. Borden was not as sentimental as Sir Wilfrid had been about the sacred right of an opposition to talk interminably; and after several weeks of open obstruction he instituted the closure and by its aid forced the bill through the Commons. The Senate, however, rejected the bill, the Liberal majority refusing their assent until the measure was submitted to the people. The government treated this challenge to appeal to the people with lofty contempt, and the Navy bill lapsed—never to be revived. By the time the question again came up, the sentiment for a Canadian navy was universal and irresistible.

This incident did something to re-establish relatively close relations between Laurier and Sifton; during 1913 and 1914 the old chieftain and his former lieutenant met upon occasions to talk about public questions. Reciprocity, by common consent, was a buried issue; and with it out of the way Sifton found that the party with which he had been so long associated was still, in Lord Haldane's phrase, "his spiritual home."

## II

When in the last days of July, 1914, it became evident that war was about to break out in Europe Mr. Sifton's first thought was that the British Empire might not be involved; and he expressed the hope that the Canadian government would not be too precipitate in making decisions. But when the war opened with unexampled range and violence he saw clearly that no course was open, in view of German aggressiveness, but full participation by Great Britain, with the assistance of the Dominions. Early in August the writer received the following letter from him:

"When I telegraphed and wrote you it looked as though there was no need of Great Britain taking part in this war,



except she was pushed into it by the jingo element. In that case I would be entirely opposed to Canada taking any part. I realize what apparently very few people do; that this war is a dreadful business, and only imperative necessity can excuse any participation in it. It is, however, to my mind perfectly clear that the actions of Germany have made war on the part of Great Britain inevitable. I think Grey did everything that was honourably possible to avoid war. The ruthless and unprovoked attack on France, which has given no provocation whatever, and the neutrality of Belgium, Luxembourg and Switzerland, show that Germany was perfectly ruthless. The question then simply resolves itself into this, whether the British Empire is to lie down and let Germany destroy its allies preparatory to destroying the Empire. There can only be one answer to this question, and that is we must stand by the British Government to the last man and the last dollar. There is a bare possibility that the war may not be long, but personally I have no hope whatever that such will be the case. I should not be surprised if we should be sending war contingents a year from now. Furthermore, if our men sail for the continent and get into the midst of the fight, I do not expect more than one-half of them ever to come back."

With this acceptance of Canada's obligations and recognition of the gravity of the peril in which the Empire stood, Mr. Sifton enlisted his services "for the duration", for the prosecution of the war to the extent of his opportunities and of his abilities. He at once advised the government that he was available for any duties they might assign him. Thereafter, while the war lasted, devotion to the allied cause took precedence over every other interest—personal, business, political. His was the attitude of tens of thousands of other patriotic Canadian citizens—nothing really mattered but the winning of the war. If his services were more notable than in most cases it was simply that his opportunities were wider and his capacity to serve, by reason of his position and influence, greater. No claim need be made for him beyond this—that his devotion and self-sacrifice

matched that of his fellow-Canadians. He gave his time, his experience and his money to the furthering of war causes of all kinds; he organized and gave to the war department the Sifton Machine Gun battery which proved one of the most valuable auxiliary arms of the service; he justified the war, and expounded the need for the whole-hearted support of it by the Canadian people in public addresses; like other Canadian fathers he saw with pride his sons enroll themselves with promptitude in the armed services of their country.

In the early weeks of the war when Canada was engaged in a frenzy of war preparation he found opportunities of rendering substantial and appreciated services to Sir Sam Hughes, the vigorous, and devoted, if somewhat tempestuous and erratic Minister of Militia; and he came to have a regard for him which survived the eccentricities of administration that finally led to his enforced retirement from the government. Hughes' performance in assembling a force at Valcartier, licking it into the semblance of an army and shipping a contingent of 30,000 men to England in the course of a few weeks, drew warm commendation from him, in marked contrast with the chorus of criticism and condemnation which, arising from the Minister's unconventional methods and daring improvisations at this time filled the air. "Hughes", Mr. Sifton wrote at this time, "has laboured with tremendous energy, much technical skill and good organizing and executive capacity. Single-minded to turn out the best force possible, he has stood off the grafters and jobbers to the best of his ability, and he is turning out an army in record time. I do not believe there is another man in the House of Commons on either side who could have done half as well. I know the inside and I know he has done wonders." In this letter, written September 21st, 1914, on the eve of the sailing of the first contingent, he



envisaged the need of greater preparation by Canada for a struggle of far more gigantic proportions than most people realized:

"I fear the war will be long and bloody. We should at once equip another division of 25,000 men, and then proceed to equip and drill another 25,000 to supply the wastage of war and disease. This is the greatest fight for liberty since the Dutch and English broke the power of Spain in the sixteenth century, and Germany is a worse menace to liberty than ever Napoleon was. Now the modern arms and munitions of war make despotic power absolutely irresistible once it gets the upper hand. More men are needed and we should send them. One of my sons sails tomorrow, and I would go myself if I had any military training. Don't make any mistake. The importance cannot be exaggerated. Canada should do her whole duty and in doing it perhaps she will find the national soul which of late has seemed sometimes to be lacking."

In this passage from a private letter Mr. Sifton sounded the note which was to give distinction to his public addresses on the war. He elaborated it notably in an address which he delivered in Ottawa, November 4th, 1915, under the auspices of the Women's Historical Society of Ottawa. His theme was liberty; "through what vicissitudes has it come to us and by what struggles has it been won?" The speaker in a wide historical retrospect sketched the age-long struggle for liberty and closed with a modern application:

"If, when Napoleon sought to invade England, with the resources of Europe at his feet, he had had command of modern ships and guns, he would have been in England in six hours, and Britain assuredly would have fallen. Britain had no army to face the veterans who had conquered Europe. Skill, bravery, tenacity are all necessary, but they are of little or no value without adequate preparation.

"What, then, is the lesson? The lesson is that if the conqueror once gets possession even for a week, once gets control of the docks and yards where the ships are built and

repaired, and the factories where the rifles, cannon, and shells are manufactured, the war is over. No human power will avail to resist him or to oust him from possession. The bravest nation in the world to-day is absolutely dependent for its national existence upon its arsenals and its factories. There can be no longer the spectacle of a brave nation standing at bay against the conqueror which has planted its force in her midst. The bravest men in the world in such a case are no better than naked savages. What does this mean? It means that no chances can be taken; that once lost, liberty and independence, so far as this generation is concerned, are gone forever.

"This is the condition that confronts us. What then is our duty? It is to give ourselves wholly and unreservedly to the task until it is accomplished. It is a solemn and an awful duty, but it cannot be shirked or avoided. An insistent public opinion has stilled the voice of partisan strife. Nowhere in the British Dominions has the government received more loyal and unquestioning support than in Canada. We may even claim that the factiousness and hysterical criticism which has marked a portion of the British Press has been notably absent from ours. Criticism there will be, and within bounds it is useful. Factiousness and political contention there must not be. In times of grave national peril a factious Press is the gravest danger of democracy. We have largely escaped it, and more and more we are becoming impressed with the seriousness of our task and the necessity for union and consolidation of effort.

"The last call has gone forth in Britain for more men. The nation has been warned that its last resources must be staked if victory is to be achieved. Victory is still far away. The toll has been heavy, and it will be heavier. Few of us will altogether escape. But better the toll than failure, which will lose all. Let no one regret that husband, brother, or son is at the front. Rather let us emulate the Spartan and the Roman mothers in the days of their primitive virtues, and send forth our sons to the fight, if need be to death, in the noblest cause in which men have ever contended.

"Whatever may be the history of Canada, and I pray that it may be a brilliant and noble one, there will be no brighter page written in that history than the page which tells of the free men of Canada taking their place on the



soil of Europe, stained with the blood and tears of centuries, to give their lives for the sacred cause of freedom."

At the first distribution of honours in Canada following the outbreak of the war, on January 1st, 1915, Mr. Sifton became Sir Clifford Sifton, K.C.M.G. Sometime afterwards he and Lady Sifton took up residence in England, largely for the purpose of affording a home for their sons and other young Canadians on their brief holidays from the trenches; and thereafter his time was about equally divided between Canada and Great Britain. The progress and development of the war was his engrossing study, and as he had in both countries exceptional means for knowing what was actually going on, which was often very different from what appeared to be happening, he was in a constant state of deep concern about the war situation, which was constantly bad and ever tending to grow worse. Acutely alive to the possibilities of disaster he had no patience with stupidity, inefficiency, favouritism and patronage in high places, of which there was no lack; and he was extremely critical of those politicians who, under the temptation of opportunity sometimes showed more interest in the immediate game of politics than in furthering the cause of the war. His indignation in the spring months of 1915 at the government for entertaining the idea of a general election, almost to the point of action, was matched a year later when Laurier insisted upon bringing up in the Dominion House the Ontario bi-lingual controversy. He had no patience with Laurier's plea that he was justified in ventilating the griefs of the Ontario minority, while admitting the Dominion had no right of intervention. Laurier's insistence upon pushing Mr. Lapointe's resolution deprecating the action of the Ontario government to a vote in the face of objections in his own following which almost brought about a split in the party, was regarded by him as clear proof that he had a political purpose to serve. The purpose to him was plain—the

strengthening of Laurier's position in Quebec against the next election. He, however, regarded Laurier as the agent of forces behind him rather than the prime mover; his weakness in yielding to pressure suggested to him that it would be a good thing for the country if Laurier would, on the grounds of age, retire from leadership of the Liberals. He wrote of "this criminal and unpatriotic agitation carried on while we are in the midst of a national crisis"; and said that as the result of what he termed a "preposterous exhibition" there would be "sooner or later a complete upheaval in Canadian politics", which would destroy "the present party organizations which are illogical and absurd." This prophecy was not so far wide of the mark; for the Liberal split which was averted in May, 1916, by the exercise of Laurier's influence, taking the form of a threat to resign the leadership, came a year later on the question of conscription.

During this year, 1916, Sir Clifford's dissatisfaction with the subordination of the Canadian forces to British War Office control, which had long been simmering in his mind, boiled over; and he made known his objections to the system then prevailing in very plain terms to Sir Sam Hughes and other members of the government. Setting out his views in a private letter he said: "I am in very great earnest about the Canadian command. I have had a chance to size up the generals for a number of years. They are a very poor lot. Alderson is a most ordinary mediocrity. Turner, Currie, Mercer or Dave Watson—any one of them is worth a dozen of him. Why in the name of heaven are these incompetents put in command of our officers? The whole scheme is preposterous. Our force should have been officered, commanded and administered as a Canadian force. If it had been there would have been several thousand fewer casualties." This was a note of protest which was to sound insistently and with increasing edge as time went on. The substitution of General Byng (afterwards



Lord Byng of Vimy) for General Alderson, as Commander of the Canadian corps, did not pacify him; and his influence constantly exerted was part of the pressure which ultimately placed a Canadian in command of the corps, with an Overseas Minister of Militia in London to keep the administration, to some extent at least, in Canadian hands. Sir Clifford's native and instinctive Canadianism was strengthened and sharpened by what he heard and saw during his several years' residence in England.

In the ordinary course of events 1916 would have been an election year; but the Borden government sought and Laurier agreed to an extension of the life of parliament for one year. It soon became evident, however, that there would be no more extensions; and with the certainty of a general election in 1917, Sifton began to canvass what would be the probable relationship between this election and the business of getting on with the war, which was the only thing in which he was interested. His correspondence in the autumn of 1916 shows that he was quite undecided as to what, from his point of view, would be a desirable outcome of the elections. On many grounds he was critical of the Borden government, but he could not see that Laurier's accession to power—which he regarded not only as possible but probable—would help win the war. In a letter to a Canadian correspondent in November, 1916, he expounded his perplexities. He thought the government was in danger. Perhaps the only thing that could save it was an appeal on its behalf "on logical grounds from someone outside of the hard-shell party Conservatives to the people at large." Unfortunately he could not see any source from which this help could come.

He feared the return of the Liberals:

"I regard the return of Laurier, without control of his actions or policy, as fraught with possible disaster. He has some very weak men close to him who have learned nothing

in the last twenty years. I am not particularly interested from the party standpoint, and have no desire to take part in an election, but I think I see farther into the situation than some of those who are taking an active part. Laurier has a good grasp of the political situation unless it can be turned on him. It is quite clear that the government cannot do the turning and he may get in with a free hand. You know how much attention he will pay to advice then. There is not much in the report that he will form a government of new men, for a variety of reasons. He will not take in anyone who will interfere with his policies and methods; of that you may be sure."

He concluded his letter by saying that he was so disturbed about this matter that he thought in the new year he would go out to Canada to canvass the situation on the ground. This letter throws a light upon the reasons for Sir Clifford's visit to Canada in May, 1917, which led to his active participation in the campaign for Union government.

### III

Though the coming of the war led to a union of hearts among the vast majority of the people of Canada, this readiness to submerge every feeling to the great task of supporting the allied cause was not conspicuously present in the ranks of the organized political parties. Politics, whatever its profession, says Henry Adams, has always been the systematic organization of hatreds. This was certainly true of the Canadian parties at the moment the war broke out. The Liberals were unreconciled to their defeat in 1911. They felt that they had been knifed by railway powers which they had nursed into life, unfairly assailed by business interests which, as they thought, had been carefully protected in the reciprocity arrangement with the United States; and above all, that they had been the victims of a conscienceless combination between Conservative ultra-Imperialists and the Nationalist extremists of Quebec. It was resentment over



the developments in Quebec in 1911 that led to the furious resistance offered by the Liberals to the naval programme in 1913; the Liberals, particularly those from the province of Quebec, thirsted to meet the government and its nationalist annex in a second trial of strength. Their confidence in their ability to defeat the government was strengthened by the government's obvious embarrassment in the face of economic depression, and the visibly impending collapse of the Canadian Northern and Grand Trunk Pacific railway enterprises.

Until the coming of the war the Conservatives showed no inclination to accept the Liberal challenge to an election; but once the issue was joined on the fields of France, with patriotic feeling running high in Canada, soldiers marching and bands playing, the practical managing element in the party began to appraise the political advantage that might be extracted from these circumstances. To them the war was primarily an opportunity for the exercise of patronage upon a scale far exceeding their wildest hopes; and if out of it could come a sweeping electoral victory and a secure tenure of office, why should they reject the offer of the gods? Hence the first contingent had hardly set sail for England before the stage was set for an appeal to the people. The *Canadian Liberal Monthly*, in April 1917, published facsimiles of the title pages of a series of campaign pamphlets which, it declared, were ready in September 1914 for election purposes. The title page of one of these pamphlets carried the slogan: "Vote Conservative for Borden Backs Britain." In this pamphlet Laurier was accused of failing to stump Quebec in the campaign for recruits. "His lips", said the pamphlet, "were sealed in so far as any appeal to his fellow-countrymen was concerned. Why? Because Laurier, now as ever, cares not a whit for the Empire."

This attempt to bring on an election was suppressed by the refusal of the more serious-minded elements in the party

to co-operate, and the prompt manifestation of public disapproval; but it was renewed with added determination in the following April and May. In April, Honourable Robert Rogers, Minister of Public Works, announced in Parliament that the people of Canada were in thundering tones demanding an election for the vindication of democratic government, and in Montreal on May 3rd he harked back to the action of the Senate in rejecting the naval bill as justification for an appeal to the people. But again influences both within and without the ministerial party blocked the movement. It was in April that Canadians got the first illustration of what war means, in the long casualty lists of the battles around St. Julien; and in their pride and grief they were in no mood to tolerate an effort by political generals to turn the occasion to party advantage.

The Liberal leader's attitude towards the war and Canada's contribution to it was, at the outset, unexceptionable. On the day Great Britain declared war upon Germany Sir Wilfrid, in a statement to the Press, declared "a truce to party strife." In the emergent war session Laurier gave his blessing to Canada's participation in the war, but in the noble speech in which he vindicated the righteousness of Great Britain's cause he made an observation which, unnoticed at the time, indicated a point of view which was ultimately to bring about the disruption of the party. The war was England's; Canada was to assist; her assistance, humble as it might be, would be appreciated both for its material value and its moral help. In time the people of Canada were to divide upon the plain issue: was Canada in the war as a principal which involved literally the sacrifice, if necessary, of the last man and the last dollar? Or was Canada a helper, whose contribution, determined by a consideration of all her interests, was, whatever its extent, to be gratefully accepted by the principal? But this dividing issue lay far in the future; in August 1914, when parliament adjourned



after its momentous four days' session, Canadians rejoiced that the shrill voice of partisan controversy was stilled and that a united country was supporting the Canadian government in the prosecution of the war.

But the truce, uneasy at best, was soon broken. It would be easy, by a careful assembling of instances, to put the responsibility for the breach upon either party; but in fact the responsibility rests, in proportions about which there is room for controversy, on both. If the pamphlets assailing Laurier and the Liberals—which were indubitably in circulation in the midwinter months—were in readiness in September, as was declared by the party's official publication, the *Liberal Monthly*, the prime responsibility for the re-emergence of party warfare, with the unscrupulousness and mendacity inseparable from it, would appear to rest upon the Conservatives. On October 15th Sir Wilfrid, in a recruiting address in Montreal, was still declaring that politics must stand aside until the war was over. It was in this address that Sir Wilfrid sounded a note that was to fill the political arena three years later: "This is a voluntary sacrifice; Great Britain accepts with gratitude what we do for her, but she does not set any obligation upon us. Once more I repeat Canada is a free country. If some Canadians were frightened by the monster of conscription in the past they must now recognize that this monster was a myth." Again the revelation of Sir Wilfrid's inward belief that Canada was voluntarily making a sacrifice to help Great Britain!

With the coming of the war the Liberal leaders undoubtedly put aside their desire for an election. They viewed with alarm and resentment the obvious determination of the professional political elements in the government to force a contest. They formulated the tactical policy, which was quite openly stated, that while they would give the government a free hand with respect to prosecuting the

war, they would hold it strictly responsible for the way it discharged this trust. In the session of 1915 they began to throw the spot-light of criticism and condemnation upon defects in the administration of the war which were coming to light—defective services, unsatisfactory supplies, graft in buying horses; while the increase in the tariff, ostensibly for war purposes, was vigorously resisted. With the apparent intention of the government to have an election, the party put itself on a war basis; and the *Liberal Monthly* blossomed out in its April (1915) issue as a campaign sheet, and so continued for the remainder of the war. Sir Wilfrid Laurier, speaking before the Liberal Club Federation at Toronto, May 21st, admitted that party preparations for an election were being made, but he offered to discontinue them upon an assurance by the government that no election would be held: "I do not care for an election. Let the Prime Minister and his colleagues say that there shall be no election as long as the war shall go on, and I will pledge myself and the party that we shall stop all preparations and think of nothing but the war." In the same address he said that "so long as the war lasts I do not care to open the portals of office with that bloody key."

Here was an occasion for a definite arrangement between the two parties excluding all possibility of an election in war-time; but no overtures were made by the government. Thereafter the two parties were on a war basis, since an election was due within a year; and as time passed, Liberal desire for an election grew in the proportion that fear of an election developed among the Conservatives. When, in the session of 1916, the question of extending the life of parliament for a year had to be met, the Liberal rank-and-file were keen for rejection; but Laurier, with a shrewder realization of the possibilities of public indignation, consented to the life of parliament being extended until the late autumn of 1917. But though no statement to



this effect was made it became a known fact that, war or no war, there would be an election in the year 1917. As the year passed by with no improvement in the war situation, with a growing probability that 1917 would see the crisis of the war, the known inveteracy of the Liberal leaders to every suggestion of a further postponement began powerfully to influence public opinion; and out of this widespread feeling of popular disgust at the prospect of a party fight, the idea of a union government representing all elements of the population who were sincerely devoted to promoting the war, which had long been present in many minds, developed almost overnight into a great nation-wide movement.

#### IV

As we have seen, the prospect of a general election in Canada, with the possibility of Sir Wilfrid Laurier coming into power "with a free hand" was in November, 1916, displeasing to Sir Clifford Sifton, who from his detached position in England saw far more clearly than did the heated partisans in Canada, the dangers of the war situation and the possibilities of defeat. In January, 1917, he received a letter from a leading Liberal, M.P., outlining the intention of the party to force an election. He at once expressed his disagreement with the plan in a letter:

"I did all I could, and it was something, to keep Borden from springing an election on the opposition. It would have been nefarious. It is just as nefarious for the Liberals to force an election now. The casuistry and subterfuge that are being indulged in are no good. The plain fact is that the Liberals think they can win, and their fine principles and holy horror at a war election have vanished. The Liberals are altogether too cocksure of the result. There is no certainty that they will win. There is a great and magnificent work for the Liberal party to do after the war, and if they destroy themselves they will never get a chance to do it. The men who are urging this are the same men who

thought I was 'off my head' in 1911. They can only see into a ditch and not across it."

He urged at least a six months' extension. "I hoped to be home in April; but I would almost go now if I thought I could avert the catastrophe." It was the last week in May when Sir Clifford reached Ottawa; by which time the crisis of union government and conscription was upon the country.

In January, 1916, the Canadian government engaged itself to make, if necessary, a contribution of 500,000 men to the allied forces. A year later it was evident that this could not be done without a resort to conscription. With the depletion of man labour, and the brisk demand for such labour as remained by munition factories, farmers and others engaged in gainful pursuits, voluntary recruitment ebbed; it was estimated that wastage at the front was seven times greater than additions to the country's military force by enlistment. The demand for conscription became general and with it there was a demand for a national government. The formation of such a government had been advocated by a number of Liberal journals for some considerable time—notably by the *Manitoba Free Press* and the *Toronto Star*; and had been vigorously resisted by newspapers supporting the government, which could see in the movement nothing but an audacious attempt to dislodge, by indirection, the Conservative government from office. But as the country moved into the new year the pressure for a national government became nation-wide; it was revealed as a spontaneous popular demand which served no political interests and no personal ambitions.

Sir Robert Borden went overseas in February; in a cable from the Front in March he said that response to an appeal for recruiting was vitally necessary. He returned to Ottawa about the middle of May and without delay announced to parliament a policy of conscription. There were required for the Canadian forces 50,000, and perhaps 100,000 men;



these could only be obtained by compulsion, since it was apparent to Sir Robert, as he stated to the House, that the voluntary system would not yield further substantial results. The announcement was, upon the whole, well received by the country; but there was at once a stiffening in the public demand for a union government. No party government, it was felt, should be entrusted with carrying out a policy so severe in itself, and so completely out of line with the earlier statements of public policy from which resort to compulsion was expressly excluded.<sup>1</sup> Sir Robert Borden on May 29th made an offer to Sir Wilfrid to join him in forming a union government, with equal representation from both parties, for the carrying out of the policy announced, if possible without an appeal to the people. On June 6th Sir Wilfrid Laurier declined; and thereupon there ensued a struggle to bring about a coalition, in the face of Sir Wilfrid's opposition, which was to drag on for four months to final achievement.

Upon the day following his return to Ottawa Sir Clifford Sifton had an interview with Sir Wilfrid Laurier at the latter's suggestion; and during the critical ensuing ten days he was to some extent in the confidence of the Liberal leader and his advisers. Later, when the issue was joined and Sifton made his choice as to the road that he must follow, charges were made that at this time he had shown a sympathy with Sir Wilfrid's position which was later belied by his acts. There was an apparent but not a real basis for these charges. Sir Clifford was not interested in the fate of any Canadian political party or any Canadian politician;

<sup>1</sup>"Whatever the antecedents of its membership, the government at Ottawa must cease to be a party organization; it must be a win-the-war government and nothing else. This has been the desire of the people of Canada for the past year; it will grow in insistence now that the government proposes to exercise the power of saying who shall go in the trenches, with the corresponding extension of control over the liberties and activities of those who stay at home."  
—*Manitoba Free Press*, May 21, 1917.

but he was deeply concerned in keeping Canada in the war to the maximum of her strength. He did not, as we have seen, want an election at all; and, in particular he did not want an election upon so highly contentious a question as conscription. His immediate sizing up of the situation was that Sir Robert Borden, by the course which he had taken, had made an election upon this issue almost inescapable; and his first concern was to see if the situation could be rectified. In a letter to the writer bearing date June 5th, he said that he feared that Sir Robert had bungled the business very badly: "He should have called Laurier in before he made his announcement; possibly the policy could have been worked out satisfactorily. As it stands now it appears to be quite impossible for Laurier to go in on a policy of conscription. The opposition to conscription in the French-Canadian population is very strong, and the opposition in labour circles is also very strong." He thought that no effective scheme of conscription could be put into operation without an election. Victory in such an election would be at the cost of arraying the English-speaking provinces against Quebec. The whole situation was to him most unsatisfactory.

As the sequel showed there was no basis in fact for Sir Clifford's surmise that if Sir Robert Borden had consulted Sir Wilfrid before announcing his policy some arrangement as to conscription could have been reached. Personal conviction and political necessities in Quebec combined to make him unyielding on this question. If he could have foresworn his personal beliefs, which is improbable, he could not have brought himself to accepting a policy which would undoubtedly have delivered Quebec to Mr. Bourassa and the Nationalists. No achievement and no gift within the gift of the people of Canada could have compensated him for defeat in Quebec at the hands of Bourassa. The theory that Laurier, if more tactfully approached, might have



accepted conscription arose from the circumstance that in place of rejecting Sir Robert Borden's offer out of hand he took time to consult his friends at Montreal and to have consultations on his behalf with friends in Toronto. But these consultations were not for the purpose of deciding whether or not to accept conscription. Upon that point there was no doubt among his intimate circle of advisers of Sir Wilfrid's position. Before Sir Robert made his announcement Sir Wilfrid, in anticipation, wrote to Sir Allen Aylesworth: "He may change, but I will not."

The delay in giving a definite answer to Sir Robert's invitation arose from the fact that there was a suggestion that an alternative proposition should be made by him to Borden as a basis for union government. This suggestion was not Sir Wilfrid's, but it came to him with a backing which obliged consideration. But in the end Sir Wilfrid declined to make any alternative proposition, and Sir Robert's invitation was met by a direct rejection. The character of the alternative proposition that Sir Wilfrid was asked to submit has never been made public, but it probably embodied the formula which was suggested over and over again in subsequent weeks, in an attempt to find a way out of the impasse—that Sir Wilfrid should stipulate that a thorough-going effort should be made to raise reinforcements to a specified number by a campaign for voluntary enlistment, engaging himself, however, to go on to compulsion if these efforts failed. It cannot be said whether any such counter-proposition would have been regarded by Sir Robert at that time as a basis for union;<sup>1</sup> but it is certain that such a programme would have kept the Liberal party intact.

<sup>1</sup>Sir Wilfrid in his letter to Sir Robert noted that the latter had told him that conscription was the only basis upon which union could be compensated. But later, as will be seen, Sir Robert showed himself agreeable to a proposition that would have postponed or eliminated conscription.

So desirous was Sir Clifford that a head-on collision between advocates and opponents of conscription should be avoided, that he was undoubtedly prepared to throw in his lot with the Liberals in the coming election if their policy was one of contingent compulsion. But to this suggestion from Sir Clifford, as to similar suggestions from followers and friends who had spent a political life time in association with him, Sir Wilfrid had one unchanging reply: he would not, by any action of his, recognize conscription or admit that under any set of circumstances it might be necessary to invoke it; the limit of his concession was to agree that a plebiscite should be taken upon the principle of compulsion, which was wholly unacceptable to those who wanted early and prompt action in view of critical conditions at the front. Upon satisfying himself that there was no way of escape along this line from an election certain to have divisive results, Sir Clifford urged Sir Wilfrid with all the persuasiveness at his command to agree to an extension of parliament. He pointed out that by taking this course he would escape responsibility for putting conscription into effect; he would keep the Liberals, conscriptionists, anti-conscriptionists, together; he would save the country from the ordeal of a war-time election; and he would put himself and his party in a strong position to make a bid for popular support in the elections that must follow immediately upon the close of the war.

But Sir Wilfrid remained polite but firm; there must be an election, and it must be fought upon the issue which the Borden government had thrown into the arena. Sifton, like others, was baffled by his inflexible adherence to the course he had marked out for himself and along which he was determined to carry his party. Sir Clifford's attitude at this time was described in detail by himself in a statement which appeared in the *Toronto Star*, September 10th, in reply to a charge made by Dr. Neely, M.P., that Sifton had said to him



early in June that he was at one with Sir Wilfrid Laurier in his opposition to conscription. In this statement Sir Clifford said:

"I said (to Dr. Neely) that I regretted very much there was likely to be a split on the subject of conscription, in which different portions of the country would be arraigned against each other, but that it was quite clear to me that the English-speaking Liberals in the House ought not to follow Sir Wilfrid Laurier on this question. Dr. Neely asked me what I thought they ought to do. I said that they ought to organize themselves and repudiate the stand taken by Sir Wilfrid Laurier, and at the same time announce their intention of supporting conscription and supporting the government in its war policy.

"It is quite true, however, that in common with many others in favour of conscription at different times, I have, in discussing the question, recognized the difficulty of enforcing it, and that it would have been desirable to have got recruits by voluntary enlistment if possible. In this respect my opinion does not differ from that of any other intelligent person familiar with political conditions in Canada."

The writer spent most of the month of June in Ottawa. When he left for Winnipeg Sir Clifford was still hopeful that the situation could be met without an election. He also hoped that a coalition government would not be necessary. He knew that coalition governments are never so effective or formidable as they look; and he knew also that the political group that makes the sacrifice in joining a coalition government is usually compelled to keep making sacrifices, often to the point of political extinction. He hoped that the Liberal members in favour of conscription would organize themselves into a definite group; and, as such, negotiate with both Laurier and Borden. He thought that they might be able, by a show of strength, to induce Laurier to agree to an extension of the life of parliament; in that case they should, in his opinion, give an independent support to the government, which would enable it to carry out its war

policies. The writer, who had had a long interview with Sir Wilfrid in which all these points were discussed, expressed to Sifton his doubts as to whether there was any workable solution short of a union between conscriptionist Conservatives and Liberals, and a submission of the issue to the electors; and departed for home.

He had hardly reached Winnipeg before he got a telegram asking him to return; and upon arriving at Ottawa he found Sir Clifford convinced, as a result of further study of the situation, that a fusion at the earliest possible moment of Liberals and Conservatives who were of one mind about the war afforded about the only avenue of escape from the threatened collapse of Canada's war effort. He had thoroughly satisfied himself that Sir Wilfrid Laurier intended to insist upon an election, which meant that he proposed to ask the people of Canada to reject compulsion. The issue which he had hoped to side-track being thus put in the foreground, he felt that the time for reservations or attempted adjustments was past. From that moment his resourcefulness, his sagacity, his political experience and his courage were put unreservedly at the disposal of the cause of the Union government. While he was not the "only begetter" of fusion government, as one might infer from the scope and vigour of the denunciations showered upon him as the campaign proceeded, it can be said that if he had remained aloof the movement would either have failed outright or would have had results far short of those which were achieved.

## V

To understand the vehemence of the demand for a national government which finally overbore all resistance, it must be recalled that it arose at a time when the issue of the war rested in the balance. There was no certainty in the early months of 1917, any more than there was certainty twelve months later, that victory awaited the allied



arms. Some of the most critical phases of the war lay hid in the future. The view, amply justified by events, that disaster would be escaped by a narrow margin through unlimited sacrifice by the nations, was widely and passionately held in Canada; and to those who held it, it seemed in 1917 that the time was near at hand when the brave talk about the last man and the last dollar would have to be made good. It was from them that the demand for a national government and for measures that would put the last reserves of the country into the furnace came. These were the people who believed that Canada was in the war as a principal; that we had not gone into the war to oblige or assist any other nation; and that the country could not set any limits to its exertions that fell short of the totality of its powers. Conscription became to them a symbol of loyalty to the cause of the war, and there developed a devotion to it that knew no qualifications.

There were others who took a cooler and more detached view of the obligations of Canada. Leaving aside the nationalists of Quebec and their sympathizers in other provinces, who did not believe in Canada sacrificing herself in what was to them a European war, there were many who held that Canada was in the war on a limited liability basis, and that it was for this country to fix the limits of her contribution. Those of this way of thinking began to question, in 1916, the wisdom of continuing to pour out so lavishly our blood and treasure when we could make a "contribution", valuable to the nations that were "principals", in the form of foodstuffs, munitions and necessities, for which we should be well-paid and in the production of which our available man power could be profitably employed. Lord Shaughnessy gave a lead to all who looked on the war from this angle in a speech in April 1916, when he doubted whether the engagement to send 500,000 men could be kept without seriously depleting the man power of the country.

Laurier privately expressed a considerable measure of agreement with Shaughnessy's point of view, and thereafter he moved steadily and perhaps insensibly to a position where he began to put an emphasis upon the value of the material aid which Canada could render upon a dollar and cents basis. He wrote in January 1917 to a friend in British Columbia that Canada had done "well, very well" in the war, "but already agriculture and industry are suffering for the lack of labour." This note hereafter was to appear from time to time in his public addresses, his speeches in parliament and pretty constantly in his private conversations; that he held the view that Canada was not a principal in the war is conceded by his official biographer.<sup>1</sup>

As the question of our relationship to the war became more insistent, the fissure in the Liberal party widened. One after another, leading Liberals who were in favour of conscription had to make their choice between party regularity and taking a political course which would enable them to give practical support to their beliefs. Reaching a decision to put their convictions first was with some a slow and tedious business. Some never reached it, and the Liberal who was at one and the same time a supporter of conscription and also a supporter of Sir Wilfrid, who would not hear of conscription, was not altogether a rarity in the ensuing campaign.

Sir Clifford Sifton, not being troubled by considerations of party regularity, came very rapidly to the conclusion, once he became familiar with all the facts, that the situation called for union between the Liberals who supported the Conscription Bill and Sir Robert Borden's following. About the same time, the end of June, one of the outstanding

<sup>1</sup>Skelton: *Life and Letters of Sir Wilfrid Laurier*, Vol. II, p. 508: "True, Great Britain and the United States had adopted conscription, but they had entered the war as principals; it would undermine the whole basis of Empire, destroy the whole spirit of free and friendly aid and sympathy if compulsion were resorted to in a country which had gone in, not for its own sake but Britain's."



Liberals, N. W. Rowell, leader of the provincial party in Ontario, came definitely to the same conclusion. He had been one of the earliest and stoutest advocates of a war government; and Sir Robert turned to him when it became evident that Laurier's refusal was final. On June 17th Mr. Rowell received an offer to enter the government, and to co-operate with the Prime Minister in bringing into being a national government. Mr. Rowell answered that the entrance into the government of two or three Liberals would not meet the situation; it was desirable that the Liberals who entered the government should have very definite and widely placed support in parliament. He suggested that formal overtures should be made, not to him but to Honourable George P. Graham and Fred Pardee, both members of the Commons. Later, Mr. Rowell and Sir Robert Borden had a personal interview which led to further conferences between Mr. Rowell and Sir Wilfrid. Mr. Rowell carried to Sir Wilfrid an engagement by Sir Robert Borden that if he would enter the government the enforcement of conscription would be postponed to a date to be agreed upon, to permit a further attempt to be made to secure the necessary men by voluntary enlistment.

This was, it will be seen, the very solution to the difficulty that was being urged upon Sir Wilfrid by some of his supporters. Sir Wilfrid rejected the proposition; he would not enter or help to form a coalition government unless conscription were abandoned. At Mr. Rowell's urging the matter was, however, further considered at a meeting on June 29th, which was attended by leading Liberals from Ontario and Quebec. Mr. Rowell carried from this conference the definite conviction that Sir Wilfrid would not join Sir Robert in forming a coalition government under any conceivable circumstances; and that so far as he could prevent it, no Liberal would enter such a government. He also

learned that Sir Wilfrid's supporters looked forward to victory in the coming election. Mr. Rowell thereupon committed himself unreservedly to the cause of union government; and at the solicitation of Sir Robert Borden undertook to sound out leading Liberals in parliament to see if a union government, constituted along the lines of the offer to Sir Wilfrid, could be brought into existence.

The first week in July, therefore, saw the beginning of the drive for union government. Mr. Rowell was in the capital, conferring with leaders of the conscriptionist wing of the Liberal party. Sir Clifford Sifton was busily engaged in similar activities, looking to the same end. Arthur Sifton, Prime Minister of Alberta, Sir Clifford's elder brother, who was in Ottawa, was sympathetic; so was Honourable James A. Calder (of the Saskatchewan Liberal government) who was also on the ground. Contacts with the members showed that on the question of conscription the split in the party was complete. The vote on the morning of July 6th on the second reading of the Military Service Bill (the Conscription Act) and Sir Wilfrid's amendment supporting the principle of the referendum, revealed to the public the depth and width of the party fissure. With the exception of four, the Liberal members from Ontario and Western Canada voted for the bill; and they were joined by four members from the Maritimes. But while they were prepared to vote to bring a conscription measure into operation despite Sir Wilfrid's resistance to such a measure, they were not ready to implement their votes by participation in a war government committed to its enforcement. Mr. Rowell, in keeping with his engagement to Sir Robert Borden, had consultations on the very day that this vote was taken, with Ontario Liberals and also with Liberals from Western Canada; but he found little support for his suggestion that they should be represented in a union government. Sir



Clifford in his unofficial soundings got the same result: not more than three members out of the twenty-eight who had voted for conscription were prepared to support a coalition.

Mr. Rowell wrote a letter to Sir Robert advising him that no co-operation from the parliamentary Liberals need be looked for; but he postponed sending it upon being advised that it might be premature so to advise Sir Robert, as certain steps were to be taken which might clarify the situation. These included the holding of a convention of Western Liberals at Winnipeg early in August; and the calling together of the Ontario Liberal candidates towards the end of July. It was also arranged that an attempt would be made to organize the Liberal conscriptionist M.P.'s into a definite group under its own officers. All these projects were directed to the same end—the formation of a distinct Liberal party committed to the enforcement of the Military Service Act which could negotiate with Sir Robert Borden about the formation of a war government on equal terms. With the known and increasing strength of conscription among the Liberal rank and file, those who were actively promoting the unionist movement looked forward to the early fulfilment of their plans.

But in these expectations they overlooked Sir Wilfrid, who was by no means reconciled to losing an essential section of his support. Sir Wilfrid was most generous in conceding that all Liberals had a right to their opinions, provided they did not push them so far as to induce them to withdraw their allegiance to the party as organized under his leadership. He set himself to work, resolutely and skillfully, to block the movement for the organization of a separate Liberal group. His personal influence was enormous; affection for him among Liberals of all shades of belief, was unbounded; and in his leadership of thirty years he had established close personal relationships with influential Liberals in every part of the Dominion. All these influences

were mobilized to prevent the disruption in feeling taking practical form. His efforts were powerfully seconded by party feeling, which had been running at dangerous heights in the Liberal party ever since the 1911 overthrow. The parliamentary party hardly had a member without some grudge which he wanted to pay out at the expense of the government. Sir Wilfrid, carefully appraising the influences which would hold the party together and finding them stronger, as he believed, than the disruptive tendencies, held resolutely to his course believing, with his immediate advisers, that this was the road to victory.

Sir Wilfrid, in all his campaigns, never desired victory more than he did in 1917. He had convinced himself, as all leaders do, that his policy was not only in the public interests but necessary for the country's preservation; and for personal reasons, having mostly to do with his own province, victory would be doubly agreeable to him. It would mean that he would die in harness; his age precluded all possibility that he could, in a later contest, rise from defeat. Victory seemed certain if he could keep the party intact. He would start the campaign with more than one-fourth of the parliamentary seats safe in the Liberal column; with a united party under his leadership the additional necessary seats could, it was believed, be easily obtained. He did not fear the consequences of individual Liberals entering the government; but anything in the nature of a coalition between the Conservatives and Liberals representing a party organization meant defeat. The first step to victory was thus to maintain and enforce his authority in his own party. There ensued, behind the party screen, a prolonged struggle between opposing influences in which, in the earlier clashes, Sir Wilfrid proved an easy winner.

## VI

Efforts to get the conscriptionist Liberal members of



parliament to organize as a distinct group ended in failure. A couple of meetings looking to this end were held. They were, however, unable to agree among themselves as to the attitude that should be taken towards the government's resolution asking for the extension of parliament for another year; and after this failure they made no attempt to act in concert. The meeting of Ontario members and Federal candidates in Toronto, on July 20, gave forth an uncertain sound. Its clearest declaration was for an early election, with Sir Wilfrid in charge of the Liberal hosts and against union government; there was a hint of approval of conscription in the event of a failure of voluntary recruiting. It became increasingly evident that clear decisive action could not be looked for from the political professionals—they were too responsive to the urge of ambitions, fears, friendships and enmities. The appeal must be to the people in the mass, who had a much clearer sense of the realities of the situation. A much more significant indication of Ontario Liberal public opinion was afforded by the gathering of Liberal editors of the province on July 26, at which a resolution was carried calling for "a war cabinet and government representing both parties"; the editors agreed to support no candidate who did not "stand squarely for compulsory military service."

Sir Clifford Sifton, watching Liberal opinion trying to take form and direction despite the hesitations and reluctances of those who should have been giving it a lead, decided to have recourse to the weapon of direct appeal to the people; and he embarked late in July upon a brief but vigorous campaign in support of compulsory service, to be applied and enforced by a war government. The opening gun of this campaign took the form of an open letter to the Honourable Hewitt Bostock, leader of the Liberals in the Senate. In this letter he said that if Sir Wilfrid were returned to power at the election which would follow his refusal to

agree to an extension, two-thirds of his followers would be pledged against conscription and to nothing but "a perfunctory and ineffective participation in the War." The predominant and controlling element behind Sir Wilfrid would not allow him to prosecute the war with vigour. The letter concluded in these terms:

"We have to face facts, not theories. The issue is simple. Either:

"(1) We put our whole strength into the war; or

"(2) We abandon our men at the front and dishonour our solemn obligation.

"I will go further. The decision of this issue will determine once for all, whether Canada is a nation, dominated and held together by a national will and national sense of honour, or is a helpless aggregation of sectional communities, held together only by the time-serving considerations of sectional interest.

"If anything in this troubled world can be absolutely clear, it is clear to-day that we can grapple with this situation in one way, and in one way only, by the formation of a union war government, administered on non-partisan lines, who will straightway appeal for a mandate to the people of Canada, and can consistently be supported by every element in the population that is loyal to the cause.

"Germany is fighting desperately to wear out the fortitude of her opponents. If she succeeds, the peace will be inconclusive. It will be no peace for us, but the beginning of an intolerable strain of preparedness for war.

"We are not fighting for sentiment, for England, for imperialism; we are fighting for the rights of ourselves and our children to live as a free community.

"Shall Canada be the first of all the allied nations to slink from the field? Let us realize the position now. It will be no use to wake up when it is too late."

After firing this shot which echoed and re-echoed throughout Canada, Sir Clifford left for the west, and delivered three addresses in rapid succession to Canadian Clubs—Winnipeg, July 30; Regina, July 31; Moose Jaw, August 1; in Calgary he gave out statements bearing on the



question of the day to the Press. These activities were inspired by the approach of the western Liberal convention called to meet at Winnipeg on August 7. Sir Clifford knew enough about conventions to know that unless public opinion was vigorously stirred up the convention would fall under the control of the official element in the party which, as events had already shown, was everywhere in favour of having a stout fight on traditional party lines, with no nonsense about getting together with the Tories. As he went from point to point he appraised the situation and noted his conclusions. His recorded judgment was that, apart from Manitoba, the delegations to the convention would be in the main controlled by party organizations to whom winning the election was the prime consideration. He wrote from Regina that the convention might do better than he anticipated, but on the whole the situation looked bad to him. From Calgary he wrote that he could say nothing encouraging as the result of his speaking trip. He had had good meetings and he had received many invitations to speak which he could not accept, but everywhere the party organizations were controlling the appointment of delegates to the convention and anti-conscription, anti-coalition representatives were being chosen.

These reports of disaster actual and impending revealed anew one of Sifton's rare political qualities. He never saw things in the rosy light in which he wanted them to be if in fact the conditions were unfavourable. He always knew when he had a fight on his hands and when he was facing odds. In the matter of the western Liberal convention he, in fact, overestimated the strength of the adverse forces. In his western addresses he put the case for union government with clarity and directness and with more emotion, as fitted the circumstances, than he usually displayed in political addresses. Some quotations from his speech in Winnipeg may be given in illustration:

"Now, sir, what are we going to do? Are we going to nourish that spirituality that we call a national soul; or are we going to admit that the sentiment so eloquently expressed since this war began has had really nothing behind it? Are we going to hold to national salvation in our policies, or are we going to retreat, in a way characterized by cowardice and weakness?

"Let me put the case to you as it appears to me. I shall spend not one minute in trying to prove to you that the liberties of the world are at stake in this contest; for that would be an insult to your intelligence. Every man with a grain of common sense knows that we are not in this war on account of vague sentiment, loyalty to Great Britain, or devotion to imperialistic ambitions. These subjects do not constitute the reason why we are in this war. Surely no one can say that any portion of the British Empire could have kept out of this war, or, being in it, can abandon a fight which is nothing less than a fight for existence, for the right to exist!

"No greater mistake could be made at this stage than to suppose that this war is won. We must win, and we must win now. It may be that we shall never have another chance. The question is, therefore, what shall we do? Shall we hold on, stand firm—or shall we abandon the struggle, and declare that we are beaten? You have a magnificent army in the field. Your reinforcements are being exhausted. Voluntary enlistment has broken down. What are you going to do? Conscript, to keep your army up to strength; or let it dwindle away and disappear, violating Canada's claims and obligations? Now, this is a question that ought not to be hard for any Canadian with red blood in his veins to answer!

"Sir Wilfrid Laurier says he has up to the present time loyally supported the war. I think he has. I have read what he has said on the subject. I do not think the people of Canada have had any cause to find fault, until the day when the conscription policy was announced in parliament, with Sir Wilfrid Laurier's attitude towards the war. But now he says he is unable to endorse the policy of conscription. This attitude is taken because he believes that that is the attitude of the people of the province of Quebec. In other words, Sir Wilfrid Laurier abrogates his position of leadership. He does not lead the people of the province of Quebec; he submits that they shall lead him—and lead



him to the rear instead of to the front. It is nothing less than a tragedy, that this venerable statesman, after a lifetime of loyal service, during which he has striven to reconcile the two races and try to get them to live together like brethren, in unity, should find himself, at seventy-five years of age, in the position in which he is placed to-day. But, Mr. Chairman, neither Sir Wilfrid Laurier's record, nor our sympathy, make any difference to the facts. The destinies of nations do not depend, and cannot depend, upon individuals—and the plain fact is, that if Sir Wilfrid Laurier wins this election, we go out of the war. There is no other conclusion that can be arrived at.

"Are we in as real earnest about this question as we should be? Do we think that our political parties and interests are of more importance than the liberties of the whole world, the lives of our sons, the welfare of that magnificent army in Europe? Are we to flounder in a morass of confusion, as the unfortunate Russian peasants have done, who have been but yesterday released from their thousand years of serfdom?

"The people of Canada, who have so well endured the sacrifices of this war, whose resolution has been so undaunted, will not fail at the eleventh hour, when the crisis is approached. In the pages of history are chronicled no deeds more glorious than those of the soldiers of Canada. The blood of every Canadian boy shed on the battlefields of Europe will cry out against a policy of failure, of cowardice,—a policy that would leave the French and British fighting, with their backs to the wall; I will not believe that such a thing can happen in Canada, until it takes place.

"In conclusion I would like to say this: Is the gain not worth the price? What is there in this world that is really worth fighting for? Country, family, religion, home, father, mother, wife, child? There is one thing and one only and it embraces all these. Out of a thousand years of suffering, bloodshed and contention, there has emerged in the last century the principle of common liberty. What is this liberty? It is the right of the men and women—not the men and women of the privileged classes only, but the men and women of all other classes—to live their lives, mentally, physically, morally, without interference to person or property. That is the principle of liberty—and that, as I say, includes everything else, as the white light includes the seven

colours of the solar spectrum. The blood of the heroes of hundreds of years has crystallized into this principle.

"Five or six years ago, we had a right to think that perhaps the sun of human liberty had finally broken from the clouds. But since that time the principle of human liberty, that sacred principle, has been outraged—how brutally, how diabolically, it is impossible to put into language!

"We stand or fall with our allies. If they lose their liberties, we lose ours. All we have that makes life worth living is bound up in the outcome of this conflict. I say, in view of all these considerations, that the gain is worth the price!"

Sir Clifford's blunt statement, made in his Winnipeg speech and repeated in his other addresses, that a victory for Sir Wilfrid meant that Canada would go out of the war, drew an immediate denial from Sir Wilfrid on the floor of parliament. He was, he declared, in the war to the end, but on the basis of voluntary enlistment and not on the basis of conscription. Sir Clifford, noting Sir Wilfrid's statement in an interview appearing in the *Calgary Herald*, August 2, said: "Sir Wilfrid in his reply proves my statement. He said he was in the war now on the same basis as he was in the beginning—that is on the basis of voluntary effort. My point is that there was no fault to be found with his position until conscription became necessary. Now that conscription is necessary and he declines to support it, his attitude proves my position to be correct, instead of refuting it."

The tactic that ultimately broke down the skilful defences which Sir Wilfrid Laurier had built around his position was that of relentlessly pressing upon the public attention the consequences that would attend a party contest, should it result in a victory for Sir Wilfrid. Sir Clifford set the example of plain speaking in his rapidly executed foray into western Canada, and thereafter the discussion took on a sharper edge with a steady hardening of Liberal sentiment in favour of union until the pressure became irresistible.



## VII

The western Liberal convention which was held in Winnipeg August 7 and 8 had been called by western M.P.'s favourable to the Military Service Bill, after consultation with members of the Liberal governments of the prairie provinces. Sir Wilfrid in a letter to Honourable W. M. Martin, Premier of Saskatchewan, credited the summoning of the convention to Sir Clifford; but it originated as here stated. It was called in the expectation that the known sentiment of the western Liberals in favour of compulsion would be so strongly represented in the convention, that it would take form in a definite political organization, ready and willing to co-operate in bringing about union government. This expectation failed. In theory, the holding of a party convention returns the control of the party as to policy and leadership into the hands of the rank and file; in practice it often means an opportunity to get an apparent endorsation from the rank and file for leaders and policies that are ripe for retirement. This perversion is possible owing to the manner in which delegates from the polls are usually chosen—not by a public gathering of electors, but by slimly attended meetings of the local party associations, which are usually made up of workers and members who are keenly interested in the party. A party convention, unless care is taken in the election of delegates, is apt to reflect not the opinions of the great mass of voters, but the wishes and purposes of the ultra-partisans—the “hard-boiled” practitioners of the political game.

This was very much the case with the western Liberal convention of 1917. The “union” sentiment was strongly in evidence in numbers and still more in the quality of its upholders, but the control of the convention was definitely in other hands; and the desire for an appearance of surface harmony, which always dominates party gatherings of this nature, led to the convention making a brave attempt to

straddle the issue. The tactical plan, already fashioned in the east, of keeping the party together by making compulsion an academic question upon which divergencies of opinion would be tolerated, provided there was complete acceptance of Sir Wilfrid Laurier's leadership, was strongly pressed upon the convention by the leaders of the old-line party element, most of whom were delegates from Alberta and British Columbia.<sup>1</sup>

It was significant, however, that there was no attempt to challenge the principles of the Military Service Act; the strength of this sentiment was recognized by those who sought successfully to deflect the convention from the purposes for which it had hopefully been called. The note that was successfully sounded was that Sir Wilfrid could safely be trusted. In spite of events at Ottawa many of the delegates refused to believe that Sir Wilfrid was definitely and irrevocably pledged to resist conscription; and J. G. Turriff, M.P., was heard with impatience when he recounted a personal conversation with Sir Wilfrid, in which

<sup>1</sup>The idea that conscription must be regarded as an academic question of no practical importance, since if pressed it would split the party, was thus set forth in the *Vancouver Sun*, July 31: "As to conscription, unless they (the delegates to the convention) are prepared to continue the dangerous game of setting the various parts of the Dominion at each other's throats, they will probably allow it to remain an open question for the electors to deal with, each according to his own conscience. That is the plane upon which Sir Wilfrid Laurier placed it in the House of Commons, and on that plane it should remain. That it is the safe course to take has been abundantly shown by the free and emancipated course taken by every member of Sir Wilfrid's following. It is in no sense a party question and any attempt to make it so would be a grave mistake." Sir Wilfrid himself was the originator of this idea. In a letter to W. M. Martin, Premier of Saskatchewan, written just before the holding of the convention (quoted in Skelton's *Life and Letters of Sir Wilfrid Laurier*, Vol. II, page 524) he said: "Upon the question of conscription, as I early realized that there was a divided opinion even in the English-speaking provinces, I would not make it a party question. If Sifton has his way he will try to commit the western Liberals to conscription. I submit to you that the best policy is the policy which we adopted here, to leave it an open question and to confine your resolutions to the broad questions for which western Liberals have long striven."



the Liberal leader had said, with complete frankness, that he would not apply compulsion if it were found necessary to do so to maintain the Canadian battalions at strength. Much more agreeable to them was the assertion of an Alberta delegate that Sir Wilfrid had told him that he was for compulsion, and that he was only waiting an opportune moment to declare himself. In the end, after much conferring together, a compromise was reached. The convention passed a resolution affirming the principle of compulsion;<sup>1</sup> as well as a resolution laudatory of Sir Wilfrid. The resolution about Sir Wilfrid was variously interpreted as nothing but a kindly recognition of the virtues and services of the old chief, and also as an expression of loyal submission to his leadership in the impending campaign.<sup>2</sup>

The *Manitoba Free Press*, which all through this crisis was in constant touch with Sir Clifford Sifton and in close harmony with his views, regarded the Laurier resolution, not as a mere expression of kindly feelings, but as an acceptance of his leadership, with all that this implied; and it

<sup>1</sup>The war resolution as adopted was a truncated version of a draft resolution drawn by the writer. It undoubtedly embodied the principle of compulsion declaring that "the entire resources of the country, moral and material, man-power and wealth, are justly disposable by the State for the preservation of the national liberties." It called for the maintenance of the Canadian forces at the front in unimpaired strength, "and the taking of all steps necessary to secure required reinforcements for this purpose." Nevertheless when J. G. Turriff, M.P. sought to add to this last provision the words "by compulsion if necessary" the convention rejected the amendment—a fact which was interpreted in eastern Canada as indicating the opposition of the convention to compulsory service.

<sup>2</sup>The resolution in its terms undoubtedly justified *Le Canada* of Montreal in holding that it left Sir Wilfrid in a position of unchallenged Liberal leadership in western Canada. It read as follows: "That this convention place on record its admiration of the life and work of the greatest of all Canadians, the Rt. Honourable Sir Wilfrid Laurier, and of his earnest endeavour to carry out his duty as he sees it in the interest of all Canada, respecting our part in the great world struggle. We express the hope that his undoubted ability, his long experience and matchless statesmanship may be utilized in reuniting the people of Canada in this great crisis; in the successful prosecution of the war; and in carrying out the platform laid down by this convention."

opened an immediate barrage upon the convention and all its works. "The net result of the convention," said the *Free Press*, "is to leave the western Liberals an integral part of the Liberal party of Canada of which Laurier is leader. They must be prepared to see Sir Wilfrid Laurier once more premier of Canada to head the government which will direct Canada's final contribution to the war." It declared that it was a win-the-election not a win-the-war convention. "The party spirit that dominated the convention was appalling. The high water mark of enthusiasm was evoked by the prediction of a glorious victory at the polls." George McCraney, M.P., summed up the situation with an observation near the mark: "The convention was not anti-conscription but anti-Borden government and, to that extent, it accurately reflected the public opinion of the west."

The momentary effect of the convention fiasco was depressing to the unionist Liberals. Mr. Rowell mailed his long-delayed letter to Sir Robert Borden, saying that in his judgment no union government could be formed prior to an election. But it was speedily seen that the ultimate effect of the convention must be to clarify the situation. It was the conclusive demonstration of the absurdity of Liberals, sincerely devoted to conscription, trying to maintain fellowship with Sir Wilfrid who opposed it with equal sincerity. The split which was not allowed to happen naturally at the convention began to show itself immediately. Sir Wilfrid wired to Honourable Frank Oliver his acceptance of the war resolution as he understood it; but to unofficial delegations, who went east to explain to him that the Liberals in the convention really hoped for an accommodation by him to the war policies set out in their resolution, he made it abundantly plain that there was to be no change in the party policy already set out by himself. In the west and less noticeably in the east, the determination to part company



with Sir Wilfrid and the Liberals who adhered to him became apparent as knowledge of the actual situation spread. There was appreciation and understanding of Sir Wilfrid's position; references to him on the platform and in the Press were considerate; but it was felt that he had made his choice and that it was now open to unionist Liberals to make theirs.<sup>1</sup> Leadership, self-appointed but none the less authoritative, soon appeared. Necessity, availability and opportunity combined to put the general direction of the movement into the hands of Sir Clifford Sifton, who remained continuously at Ottawa during the critical succeeding weeks.

On the morrow of the convention a telegram from Sir Clifford to the writer,—who in the ensuing drama played an active if minor role—advised that there should be a fight to a finish against the compromise attempted by the convention. "You are", said the telegram, "on absolutely safe ground". Thereafter there were telegrams or letters almost daily from him. Though there was no reference to the fact it was plain to see that Sifton had established contact with Sir Robert Borden. He had taken on the job of securing Liberals, who by their standing and character could fairly claim to be representative of the party, for the war government projected by Sir Robert. In one of these early letters he wrote: "I have finally decided to go in and fight it out to a finish."

During these weeks of struggle in the Liberal party there was also turmoil in the Conservative ranks; but Sir

<sup>1</sup>The *Toronto Star*, about August 1st, explaining why it could not follow Sir Wilfrid, said: "We have a good deal of sympathy with Sir Wilfrid Laurier when he argues his case, when he says he was consulted too late, that he was ignored all through the war until incompetence had created an impossible situation. We even go so far as to agree that he was not offered coalition until a situation was created which made acceptance on his part well nigh, if not altogether impossible. That he fights back is natural enough. He has chosen not to let his main enemy, Bourassa, prevail over him in Quebec, the scene of the greatest activities of his life. That is the choice he has made."

Robert knew his own mind, had definite ideas as to what he desired to accomplish, and by virtue of his position of authority in the party, remained in easy control of the situation. His offer to Sir Wilfrid was the result of long consideration. There is reason to believe that he was preparing a year earlier to make overtures to the Liberal chief, when the breaking out of the bi-lingual issue in parliament, with its accompanying display of party feeling, gave him pause. If he complicated matters by declaring for compulsion before he made his offer to Sir Wilfrid, it was his judgment not his intention that was at fault; convinced as he was that conscription was necessary he thought it would smooth the way for Laurier if he took the full responsibility of making the decision. Once he made up his mind that a national government was necessary to the full exertion of Canada's powers, he never wavered in his determination to bring one about; and he showed endless patience in seeking a meeting point with available Liberals.

To some of his colleagues and many of his supporters his determination to bring about union gave great offence. As the Liberal quarrel developed they thought they saw a chance to win a party victory on the issue of the war, and they never ceased conspiring together to block the movement for union government until the government was actually in existence. They sought to convince Sir Robert that he was delivering himself and his party into the hands of their traditional enemies. Once the conscriptionist and anti-conscriptionist Liberals found themselves in a majority in the new house, would they not seek the first occasion to show Sir Robert and the Conservatives the door? Why not let the coalition be among the people at the polling booths, voting for Conservative win-the-war candidates? To these pleadings, often accompanied by threats, Sir Robert made one steady unvarying reply. He made it to the Conservative caucus in July, and he repeated it in more



than one letter to protesting supporters: "It is my desire and intention to form a government based upon the union of all persons, irrespective of party, race or creed, who are sincerely desirous of uniting in a common and earnest effort to put forth the whole power and strength of this Dominion for the winning of the tremendous struggle in which our Empire, with the other allied nations, is now engaged." When Sir Clifford took up the task of trying to get Liberal colleagues for Sir Robert's war government he knew the mind of the premier and he knew also that it would not change. Upon that foundation he began to build.

A study of the field in the light of conferences with members of parliament satisfied him that the approach to accomplishment lay through the West. The Ontario Liberal M.P.'s were dropped from consideration; they were mostly for conscription and for Laurier—no hope there. There were Liberal members of parliament from both the Maritimes and the prairies who were prepared to enter a union government, provided they went in as part of a Liberal group. It was known that Mr. Rowell was available on the same terms. Plainly the puzzle could be solved if the co-operation of western leaders, outside of the Dominion parliament, could be secured. Mr. James Calder, of the Saskatchewan government was in Ottawa; he had conveyed to Sir Wilfrid fruitlessly his unofficial interpretation of what the western convention desired him to do, and was staying over awaiting developments. Mr. Arthur Sifton was also in the East. Urgent requests were sent by Sir Clifford Sifton to Mr. T. A. Crerar of Winnipeg, and Mr. Henry W. Wood of Calgary, as representing the organized farmers, to go East for consultation; and this they did, after some slight delay.

By August 20, there was assembled in Ottawa an unofficial but representative gathering of Liberals, which approached the problem of union government with a real

desire to see it solved. There was agreement among them that union government was necessary; there was willingness to serve; nevertheless, though a tentative list of Liberals for a union government was drawn up which varied but slightly from the final slate, it was found impossible to bring negotiations to a successful close, as had been hoped. The prospective ministers wished to consult their associates; they wished also to explore the possibilities of obtaining as Prime Minister some outstanding Canadian who was remote from the political strife of the day. There was no personal objection to Sir Robert Borden; but they felt that in view of all the circumstances, Liberal support would be more easily obtained for a government in which Sir Robert would serve under a new head. Interchanges of views between Sir Robert and some of the conferring Liberals took place in an atmosphere of understanding friendliness; to them, as to many others during these months of trial, Sir Robert said that he was unreservedly at the disposal of his country—he would serve or, given “an honourable discharge” he would retire. Mr. Justice L. P. Duff of the Supreme Court was the leader the Liberals had in mind; but it was at once learned that he was not available. These informal conferences between the Liberals lasted for some days; and several points were settled. Mr. Wood and Sir Clifford Sifton excluded themselves from the list of cabinet possibilities; and it was agreed that if a union government was formed the western Liberals would be represented in it by Honourable Arthur Sifton, Premier of Alberta, Hon. J. A. Calder of Saskatchewan, and T. A. Crerar of Manitoba.

The western delegates returned west and there was an enlarged conference at Winnipeg, August 24 and 25, in which all the western Liberal provincial governments were represented. The conference approved the arrangements tentatively made but took an unexpectedly firm stand on the question of leadership. The conference wired east that



“they favoured a national government and the formation of a war council of six, of which Sir Robert Borden should be one, but they thought a change of leadership essential and suggested four gentlemen, of whom Sir George Foster was first named, and added the understanding that all these gentlemen would, under another leader, be willing to serve, together with strong eastern colleagues.”<sup>1</sup> The alternatives to Sir George Foster were Sir William Mulock, Sir Adam Beck, and F. B. Carvell, M.P. This stipulation by the western Liberals very nearly shipwrecked the union government movement. The Conservative caucus held on August 30, with enthusiastic unanimity, rejected the proposition that Sir Robert Borden should retire. Those who desired union government would hear of no other leader than Sir Robert; while those who hoped fusion would never take place seized the opportunity to put an obstacle in its way by insisting upon Sir Robert’s retention. No serious objection, in fact, was taken by unionist Liberals generally to the refusal of the Conservatives to denote Sir Robert; to many the reasons for this demand by the leaders seemed worthless.<sup>2</sup>

Sir Clifford Sifton, though he did not discourage the movement to this end which he probably regarded as a necessary step in the development of events, was not in favour of it, though the early suggestion—which was withdrawn almost as soon as it was made—that Mr. Justice Duff might be available, was not without its attraction for him. His views on this point are on record. From a letter bear-

<sup>1</sup>As stated in the Conservative caucus, August 30, by Sir Robert Borden.—*Canadian Annual Review*, 1927, page 581.

<sup>2</sup>The *Manitoba Free Press* consistently discouraged the suggestion that Sir Robert Borden should be displaced by a new leader. On August 7 it said that there was no practicable suggestion for an alternative Premier to Borden; and on August 23, when the Unionist Liberals were meeting in Winnipeg, it warned them against insisting upon this demand to the point of wrecking the movement. They must, it said, produce a politically available alternative, or accept Sir Robert’s leadership without question.

ing date August 14: "We have failed entirely to get any arrangement for an outside leader. We cannot afford to break up the solid Conservative party and therefore could not consider anyone who was not satisfactory to them. Duff is not available. A certain Chief Justice in Ontario was considered, but the objections were too strong." He went on to say that a very strong point to him was that Borden was a known quantity; the Liberals could work with him. "We could tell nothing about a stranger. He might be obstructive, and he might want to take the bit in his teeth and run along with the whole thing." The failure of the Liberals to obtain a new leader should not in his view put any obstacle in the way of forming a national government. Following the Conservatives' rejection of the Liberal request for a change in leadership, Sir Clifford Sifton paid a flying visit to Winnipeg, where he talked over the situation with the active Liberal unionists. He thus satisfied himself that there was no danger of a final breakdown owing to insistence upon this condition by the Liberals and returned to Ottawa convinced that success was near at hand.

The negotiations having reached no conclusion by the first of September there was by common consent a suspension of further effort until the close of the session. The dying parliament operating on a time limit which drew to its close, was, under the stimulus of closure, passing measures, such as the War Times Election Act and the bill for taking over the Canadian Northern, which stirred party feeling to white heat. It was a matter of general knowledge that Sir Robert Borden intended after the session to have Liberal colleagues; if Liberals in a representative capacity would not come in, he would seek the services of individual Liberals of high standing. There was no doubt that by these means he could get Liberal colleagues of distinction; and it was evident that the unionist Liberals, who by



now were admittedly a great multitude, would regard the presence of these Liberals in it as sufficient justification for supporting the Borden government. The strategists in the official Liberal party began to note the shipwreck of their plans; they had been successful in holding the officers, but the unionist army was lost to them. Rumours began to circulate that Sir Wilfrid, realizing that his leadership meant the disruption of the party and defeat, was about to retire.

Meanwhile, the western Liberal leaders who had been keeping in constant touch with one another after the suspension of the August negotiations, with Sifton at Ottawa, watchful and informed, decided to meet immediately after the close of Parliament to further consider the situation. Accordingly, there was held in Winnipeg on September 20, a conference of western Liberals which had momentous consequences. N. W. Rowell, who was in the city on his way to British Columbia, was also in attendance. In the intervening three weeks the objections to Sir Robert had disappeared; and as the result of the conference the writer was able, on September 21, to wire Sir Clifford the welcome news that the western Liberal leaders were prepared to renew negotiations with Sir Robert. They suggested an early date in October for meeting in Ottawa to resume the conversation. They paid some attention to a report, which had been carefully conveyed to them by telegraph, that a definite date had been fixed upon which Sir Wilfrid would turn the leadership of the Liberals over to Frank B. Carvell; and they agreed that if there should be this welcome development they would put the negotiations into the new leader's hands, and give him their best co-operation. While no reliance was placed upon the rumour, Mr. Calder was deputed to proceed east to make enquiries and report back. He found there was no basis for the suggestion that Sir Wilfrid was contemplating retirement; and early in October, in keeping with arrangements made by Sir Clifford,

Mr. Crerar, Premier Sifton, Mr. Calder and Mr. A. B. Hudson, Attorney-General in the Manitoba Liberal government—the latter in the capacity of counsellor—met Sir Robert Borden to renew negotiations.

Mr. Rowell, hastening from British Columbia, soon joined the party. Liberals from the Maritimes also joined in the negotiations. It was apparent that this was the last chance for making an arrangement which would give the aspect of a fusion to the new government, since Sir Robert Borden, face to face with an election, was already adding individual Liberals to his government. C. C. Ballantyne, a Montreal Liberal, had already entered the government; General Mewburn was about to do so as Minister of Militia; and Hugh Guthrie had accepted the post of Solicitor-General. Isaac Pitblado, an eminent Liberal lawyer of Winnipeg, had consented to join the government forthwith if the negotiations failed. The circumstances in the earlier negotiations had lent themselves to the encouragement of indecision and procrastination; but this time they demanded and enforced promptitude in decision and in action. Again the report was in circulation that Sir Wilfrid would resign to make way for a leader more acceptable to the Liberals who were on the verge of uniting with Sir Robert—this time apparently with a foundation of truth. But it was too late to take note of this possible development; the flood of opportunity had ebbed. On October 11th, at midnight, the Liberals, who were in council in the Chateau Laurier, decided that the terms offered were acceptable; and Mr. Rowell and Mr. Calder walked over to the Prime Minister's offices in the nearby East Block to tell him that they and their associates were at his disposal. The morning papers of October 12 carried the announcement that union government was assured; and next day the ministers were sworn in. The long campaign had ended at last in victory.

Some notations from Sir Clifford's letters at this time



may give a suggestion of the political atmosphere in which Ottawa at the time was engulfed:

October 3. The situation was in wild confusion here this morning. The reactionary elements are striving desperately to prevent union, and are most unscrupulous in their methods. Saw Calder this morning. There is ground for belief that the negotiations will be successful, though the difficulties loom up very large. If the negotiations are not successful there will have to be a re-organization without our western friends.

October 4. Everything here looks very uncertain but on the whole somewhat hopeful. Ballantyne was sworn in yesterday. I expect that Mewburn will be sworn in as Minister of Militia, and Guthrie as Solicitor-General this week. I believe that Laurier's resignation looks probable, but it is clear that the eastern official Liberals have deliberately and finally decided to stay out. It is said that Laurier's threatened resignation is due to the fact that the Quebecers insist upon him giving a pledge to repeal the Military Service Act, if it comes into power. With respect to the western men—Arthur and Calder are here. I believe they are in a very reasonable frame of mind. The jackals on both sides are circulating so many lies that it is hard to keep things on an even keel. I have never seen a larger amount of unscrupulous malice than is displayed by these mischiefmakers. PS. Have just seen Arthur. I am very hopeful.

October 9. The western men are now in negotiation with Sir Robert Borden; they met him yesterday and are meeting him to-day. I have not yet learned what has transpired, but there is a Tory element that is moving heaven and earth to prevent coalition. I am not taking any part in the immediate negotiations and am quite uncommitted.

October 15. I suppose you are feeling somewhat the sensations of "the day after". It has been a prolonged strain, but the victory is complete. Desperate efforts were made at the last moment to upset the coach. The effort from the Tory side was the most dangerous and was very nearly successful. There are a good many private heart-burnings, but such things must be in every famous victory. The new government is strong enough to attend to its own business and I shall therefore be free to attend to mine. The election result is of course a practical certainty now.

## VIII

Sir Clifford Sifton's contribution to the formation of Union Government, if we are to take at their face value the opinions of the official Liberals who sought to prevent its formation, must be put very high. They saw him as the inspirer and director of the movement which threatened destruction to their hopes; and wherever there was a manifestation of Unionist feeling he was regarded as its instigator. Thus in the great "Win-the-war" demonstration in Toronto in the first week in August, which gave definite direction to the movement in Ontario, they saw his hand, though in fact his interest in it was purely sympathetic. Once it became known that Sifton was definitely in the battle his reputation for political prescience, for organizing ability, and for a seemingly uncanny ability to develop tactical strokes fatal to his opponents, combined to give him, in the public mind and particularly in the fears of the Liberals, a position of exaggerated importance. The ultimate judgment of history is not likely to reverse the opinion of Sir John Willison that he was one of two men who were primarily responsible for the success of the movement for coalition,<sup>1</sup> but the demoniac energy and Machiavellian astuteness ascribed to him by the Liberal campaigners were largely the product of their imaginative fears.

In the *Liberal Monthly* of August, 1917, several pages were given over to the exposure of Sir Clifford's aims, motives and ambitions; he was pilloried in cartoons, and lampooned with the coarse jocoseness that does duty for wit in campaign literature. In the main article directed

<sup>1</sup>Willison's *Sir Wilfrid Laurier, and the Liberal Party*, Vol. II, page 446: "Among Liberals, if he could still be called a Liberal, Sir Clifford Sifton alone gave earnest and continuous support to the movement for coalition, not out of any regard for the Prime Minister but because he was profoundly convinced that the situation demanded a national government representing all parties, sections and interests. If at length such a government was organized, to Borden and Sifton the credit chiefly belongs."



against him he was charged with an ambition to be himself the leader of the Union government. He had been mainly instrumental, it was declared, in putting a government of the Big Interests into power in 1911. "But he won't be happy until he gets there himself—Borden and Tom White and Rogers having made such a mess of it." He was also the tool of Imperialistic schemers who were conspiring to subvert the liberties of Canada. "For years past", said the *Monthly*, "Sir Clifford has been the power behind the Round Table movement in Canada. Imperialism—a central Parliament in which Sir Clifford Sifton would figure as the brain-carrier of Canada—has been one of his dreams. But even this did not survive the blundering intrusion of Sir Robert Borden. Foiled in the attempt to destroy Confederation by the Round Table scheme of centralized Imperialism, Sir Clifford saw in Union government at Ottawa an opportunity to deal Canadian autonomy a blow." In these designs he was acting in concert with Lord Northcliffe, then representing the British Government in the United States on a special mission. "If rumour does not lie he is in close touch with Lord Northcliffe, who is now a British agent in the United States, and who is not a disinterested spectator of the political crisis which is disrupting this country." The cartoon by Bengough represented Sifton as an office boy, saluting Big Business personified by a row of portly individuals.

These absurdities were not simply the product of journalistic imagination; they were the expression of beliefs that were held in the inner circle of official Liberalism. Sir Wilfrid, in his exasperation, was prepared to think the worst of Sir Clifford's intervention; this is quite clearly shown in Dr. Skelton's *Life and Letters of Sir Wilfrid Laurier*. Sir Wilfrid's suspicions may be here noted. Dr. Skelton says (Vol. II, page 517):

"The real reasons (for Sir Clifford's course) Sir Wilfrid could not fathom, though he believed they were connected with the desire to have an amenable parliament for the enactment of certain plans for meeting the approaching crisis in the affairs of the Canadian Northern & Grand Trunk Pacific. Once it was clear that his advice on the really vital one of the three points (that suggesting the enlargement of the parliamentary term for a year) would not be taken, and that an election was inevitable, Mr. Sifton sought the same ends in another way seeking, it may be, a still more amenable parliament by supporting coalition and supporting conscription."

In a letter to Mr. Rowell written on July 4 (quoted by Skelton, Vol. II, page 522) Sir Wilfrid said: "I have evidences coming to me every day that certain railway interests are actively at work amongst our friends still, with a view to forming a coalition. Such sinister influences are not calculated to impress one favourably." The most conclusive comment upon this expression of Sir Wilfrid's fears is that supplied by the record of events. The parliament already in existence and the government already in office were so extremely well disposed towards the Canadian Northern that no more "amenable" parliament nor government could be desired. Nor was an extension of parliament necessary for the passing of legislation desired by the owners of the Canadian Northern, since this legislation was enacted before parliament was dissolved, while Union government was still only an aspiration. That, in the early days of July when the movement for Union government began to take form, Sir William Mackenzie and his entourage were active in the corridors of parliament, is a fact; but the interpretation put upon these activities at the time by some onlookers, that Sir William Mackenzie's anxiety arose from an apprehension that a change in the government might prejudice the carrying out of the arrangement, almost completed, for the taking over by the government of the Canadian Northern,



appears to have been nearer the mark than Sir Wilfrid's guess. The composition of any government—whatever its political stripe—was always a matter of concern to Sir William, because he did, or tried to do, business with all the governments of Canada; and he may well have thought it in his interests to busy himself in the hope that if a Union government was to be formed the new members would not be hostile to his interests.

But Sir Clifford was certainly no party to manoeuvres of this sort which, in fact, had no bearing whatever upon the ultimate results of the movement for Union government. Of the Canadian Northern legislation passed in September by the dying parliament, by which the government took over the common stock of the road, agreeing to have the value fixed by arbitration, he was very critical. He objected particularly to no limit being put upon the amount to be paid for the stock, and when subsequent to the formation of Union government a limit of ten million dollars was set by Order-in-Council, he regarded it as a service rendered to the country by the Liberal members of the new government.<sup>1</sup>

The view that the coalition movement derived in some way from the desire of "Round Table" Liberals to further Imperialistic designs, was also held by Sir Wilfrid. "Those I hold responsible," he wrote Sir Allen Aylesworth, June

<sup>1</sup>In a letter to the writer after the announcement that a limit would be set to the amount to be paid, Sir Clifford said: "You ought to point out that this agreement does not appear yet to be signed. It should be signed immediately, and an official announcement made to that effect before the people are called upon to discuss the issues of the campaign. It will be like the company to get it held back until after the election and then play on one motive or another to get the maximum left out. The late Conservative government bears the whole responsibility for the transaction, but it is not forbidden to the War Liberals to enjoy a good deal of satisfaction out of the fact that the promoters of this railway are finally eliminated from Canadian politics." This is hardly the language of one who sought by the Union movement to create a government that would do chores for the Canadian Northern.

22<sup>1</sup> "are the Liberals of the 'Round Table' group, who by their alliance with the Tories, have joined the government to take up the issue of conscription, at so much risk and danger to the country." Any suggestion that Sir Clifford was identified with Round Table plans of Empire consolidation has, in the light of subsequent events, a somewhat ludicrous air.

Sir Wilfrid, as Dr. Skelton reveals, thought that Sir Clifford had something to do with the enactment of the War Times Election Act. This election measure, which was fathered by Mr. Meighen and put through under closure, enfranchised women who were next-of-kin to men serving overseas; and disfranchised all citizens, coming from enemy countries and naturalized since 1902, unless they were represented in the Canadian armies by near relatives. The disfranchised "New Canadians" were given compensation by being exempted from the operation of the Military Service Act—that is, they could not be conscripted. "Robert Rogers", says Dr. Skelton (*Life and Letters of Sir Wilfrid Laurier*, Vol. II, page 530) "was forced to watch his old rival Clifford Sifton, taking up his original idea and inducing the Prime Minister, who had refused to use it to elect a Conservative government with Rogers in, to use it to elect a unionist government with Rogers out."

The authority for this statement, which put the primary responsibility for this electoral innovation upon Sir Clifford, was presumably Sir Wilfrid Laurier. If so it can only be said that he was wholly mistaken. Sir Clifford not only had nothing to do with the War Times Election Act, but he regretted its passage. The writer interchanged views with Sir Clifford upon this matter and can speak with knowledge and authority. Sir Clifford regarded the enactment of the measure as an unfortunate consequence of the failure up to

<sup>1</sup>Skelton: *Life and Letters of Sir Wilfrid Laurier*, Vol. II, page 518.



that time of efforts to get Liberals to enter the government; their presence would, he said, have prevented its introduction. He regarded it as a manoeuvre intended to further the interests of the Conservative party, whose leaders at the time of its passage had no assurances that they would not in the forthcoming elections have to meet the joint onslaught of both wings of the Liberal party. He deprecated the introduction of the measure; he thought its operation would have unfortunate effects; but, with his sense of political reality, he said that this legislation was, if not excusable, at least understandable, under the circumstances as they existed.

As for the charge, so ardently pressed in the earlier phases of the controversy, that Sir Clifford Sifton, in his advocacy of Union government, was seeking to serve some political ambition, the appeal is again to the known record. It is beyond question that it was by his own decision that he was not a member of the Union government.<sup>1</sup> In retrospect it is seen that all the circumstances reveal Sir Clifford as, in his activities in 1917, seeking nothing but to serve the cause of his country, as he saw it. There was in this attitude of disinterested and self-sacrificing devotion to public duty nothing that marks Sir Clifford out from his associates in the movement for Union government. About the wisdom of the course which they took, controversy may continue to rage. About the results of their activities, whether useful to the war effort of Canada or ultimately of

<sup>1</sup>In a statement made to the Canadian Press which appeared in the Canadian daily newspapers on April 18, 1929, Sir Robert Borden said: "From time to time during the war I consulted Sir Clifford Sifton on very difficult questions, and I have a most grateful memory of his assistance, especially during the extremely trying months of 1917. He was indefatigable, earnest and unselfish in his efforts to bring about the formation of a strong Union government. Again he put his personal interests in the background, for he could have been a member of the Administration which I eventually succeeded in forming, but he declined for the reason that his inclusion might create antagonisms that otherwise could be avoided."

benefit otherwise to the country, there may be grounds for honest differences of opinion. But the motives and intentions of these men remain wholly admirable in the fiercest light that can be thrown upon them. They saw but one thing—the need for bringing into the final and critical phases of the war the full available strength of Canada, as one of the principals in the struggle; and to serve this end they subordinated their political associations, their personal feelings and in some cases dearly cherished ambitions. That with exceptions hardly worth noting they became political casualties of the war proves, not that their calculations were wrong but that they acted, without calculation, at the call of duty.

## IX

In the general election campaign which followed immediately upon the formation of Union government, Sir Clifford took no public part. It was a campaign notable for its public speaking, the ranks of the regular performers being heavily reinforced by aspiring amateurs. But Sir Clifford made no speeches, wrote no articles and gave out no interviews. He was consulted by the election managers, and gave a good deal of advice and some contribution of work in connection with the campaign in Ontario. After his first survey of Ontario he reported the situation not as favourable to the government as he expected from the statements made to him; but just a week before the election he gave the opposition from ten to twelve seats; they won eight. His opinion was that if capably led the opposition would have made a considerable showing in Ontario. "The popular feeling outside of the towns," he wrote, "is disappointing and very stubborn." The result was undoubtedly affected by the government's announcement of a generous policy of exemption for farmers' sons engaged in food production—a decision taken, in part at least, as the result of a strong recommendation by Sifton.



Sir Clifford took no active part in the election because he did not think it necessary; the government was strong enough in his opinion to present its case adequately to the country.<sup>1</sup> To present the case adequately was to win, if there was a predominant demand for compulsion, as to which there was no doubt. The issue which Sir Clifford set out in his letter to Senator Bostock and in his western speeches, steadily pressed, had split the Liberal party in two and made Union government possible; it was only necessary to put this issue determinedly before the people to ensure victory at the polls. This issue was the simple declaration that success for Sir Wilfrid Laurier, so far as any contribution of additional man-power was involved, meant that Canada would go out of the war.

Sir Wilfrid resented this statement when it was first made by Sifton. Writing immediately thereafter to Premier Martin of Saskatchewan, Sir Wilfrid said: "The attitude taken by Sifton is not only mischievous but it is untrue. He bases his propaganda upon the extreme attitude of the nationalists, for which he makes me responsible and which—even now—I am fighting in the province of Quebec." Sir Wilfrid, in his struggle to prevent the development of a Unionist Liberal wing and afterwards in his bid for electoral support outside of Quebec, was faced with the necessity—in view of the state of public opinion—of convincing doubters that, without resort to compulsion, he could, given power, make a contribution to the war equal, in effect, to the effort promised under conscription. He

<sup>1</sup>Though Sir Clifford took no part in the election, he received considerable attention from opposition campaigners in the west who, harking back to the 1911 campaign, sought to minimize his influence by representing him as intervening on behalf of big business interests fearful of Liberal victory. Charges, wholly untrue, were made by the more reckless campaigners, that Sir Clifford was largely interested in the Canadian Northern, which had just been bought out by the government—though there had been a complete statement by Sir Thomas White to Parliament of Canadian Northern ownership.

failed in doing this—first with the insurgent Liberals and afterwards with the electorate at large.

He made a brave fight of it. There is no more gallant episode in Canadian politics than Sir Wilfrid's 1917 campaign. In his 76th year, with but the remnant of his once invincible army, with most of his trusted associates aloof or in the opposing ranks, he started out with courage and confidence to fight a winter campaign. But he carried a hopeless handicap. There was in his tactics none of the ingenuity and pliability of his earlier conquering campaigns. He stuck doggedly to a stereotyped appeal which he sought to make effective by platform eloquence and by capitalizing to the fullest extent the admiration and personal affection of those who had for a generation followed where he led. All his efforts to create in the public mind a faith in his power to get the necessary reinforcements by persuasion was vain, in the face of ever accumulating evidence that Quebec was being solidified in its opposition to the government by the bold advocacy of a policy of the withdrawal by Canada from further war contributions, other than supplies to be bought and paid for. It was possible to quote statements from lieutenants of Sir Wilfrid, highly placed in the party, which gave no support to the view that under different auspices there would be a greater willingness upon the part of Quebec to contribute her due proportion of man-power. There was, as an illustration, the speech in parliament by Geo. H. Boivin, M.P. for Shefford, in which he summed up some of the reasons why his constituents were opposed to the Military Service Act: Because there was a shortage of labour for farms and munition factories; because the acreage of wheat was reduced; because conscription would be a detriment to immigration; because idle young men could be employed to better advantage on the farms than in the trenches; because Great Britain needed food more



than she needed men; because surplus men in Canada could be employed building boats to repair the ravages of the submarine campaign; because conscription would reduce the glory of the volunteers; because Canada's contribution of 420,000 men should be proportionately equalled by the allied nations (no doubt with the United States in mind) and sister nations before Canada was asked for more; because it was a war of attrition in which Canada was in no danger of attack; because "nationalist eloquence paid for by Conservative gold has argued that Canada owes nothing to England"; because Canada could not do more with regard to pensions, etc., than provide for those already in the field.<sup>1</sup>

There was the statement by Honourable Rodolphe Lemieux on November 23, during the campaign, that Canada had already done enough and could afford to wait until the United States had furnished at least 1,500,000 men. This, as Mr. Bourassa hastened to point out, was a rejection of voluntary enlistment. Statements such as these which abounded during the struggle were ruinous to Sir Wilfrid's campaign in the English-speaking provinces. It was in vain for him to say that he merited support because by his policy he was saving Quebec from the extremists,<sup>2</sup> the retort that his following had accepted the policy of the nationalists was as obvious as it was effective.

The Unionist Liberals, dealing gently with Sir Wilfrid, said truly that he was the prisoner of forces which would control any government he might form. "If Borden is defeated", Isaac Campbell told a Winnipeg audience on

<sup>1</sup>*Hansard*, 1917, page 2833.

<sup>2</sup>The *Manitoba Free Press*, in its issue of November 19, dealing with this claim, said that Mr. Bourassa had captured the leadership of Quebec. "He has done it by simply imposing his views first upon the people of Quebec. What Bourassa preaches to-day, the French Liberals will be putting out as their own views six months hence or next year at the latest. These successive surrenders have been euphemistically described as 'saving Quebec from Bourassa'."

December 5, "Sir Wilfrid will occupy his seat and be the king. But behind him could be seen the shadows of those who had the real power—Bourassa and Lavergne. Suppose Sir Wilfrid wins and comes into office, I don't think he will come into power. The Quebec nationalist party won't allow him a free hand on the question of winning the war. He won't hold office a day if he runs counter to their wishes." Mr. Rowell said the issue might as well be frankly faced. The political situation in Quebec was dominated by a nationalist movement which by its strength in the province, sought to dominate the Dominion's political situation. Speaking of the Unionist Liberals he said: "We found ourselves compelled to choose between supporting Sir Wilfrid Laurier and a policy shaped to secure nationalist support which we believed would take Canada out of the war, or to decline to follow him." Arguments such as these were crushing in their simple effectiveness to the Liberals, and their union in the polling booths with the Conservatives gave the government a sweeping victory on December 17. The Liberals carried 62 out of 65 seats in Quebec; in the other eight provinces they were victorious in 20 constituencies out of 170.

With the election over, Sir Clifford resumed his attitude of detached and critical independence, and in that mood departed for Great Britain. Before going he indicated to the writer some of his expectations in connection with the new government. He hoped the government would take over the munitions plants, and thus stop the making of huge private profits by the manufacturers. He did not regard the composition of the government as completely fulfilling the terms of the Union agreement; he looked to Sir Robert Borden, in keeping with a statement made by him at Uxbridge during the campaign, to strengthen the Liberal representation until there was a fifty-fifty division of the government. He desired a radical re-organization at head-



quarters in London, with a clear recognition of the responsibility of headquarters to the Minister of Militia and to the Canadian parliament, thus bringing to an end the system of war office control which he had long resented. He rejoiced over the action of the government in prohibiting the importation of liquor. "I only regret", he said "that my dear old dad did not live to see the success of the cause to which he gave a lifetime of work and for which he kept himself poor."

Just before taking ship at New York late in December he wrote a letter of angry protest against the action of the military authorities, in prosecuting a man in Toronto named Swann for making statements "calculated to discourage recruiting"; and getting him sentenced to a year in jail. Sir Clifford wrote:

"This case makes my blood boil. We are supposed to be fighting for liberty, but there could be no worse and more outrageous tyranny than this in Germany. In the first place, there is no longer any recruiting. Recruiting is superseded by conscription. The only legal offence is incitement to disobey Military Service Law—that is an offence properly punishable. But anyone has a perfect right to criticize the Military Service Law, to attack it and to agitate for its repeal. Men who do not agree with us about the war have as good a right to their opinions as we have, and just as much right to express them. I detest mob law and the howling down of a man because the mob does not agree with him. This is no whit better in Toronto than it is in Sherbrooke or Berlin (Kitchener),<sup>1</sup> and if this kind of thing is allowed you are going to have freedom of speech at the mercy of ignorant third-class officials, as is the case in England. If the government keeps this up, they can look out for criticism from me."

With his four months' battle for national government

<sup>1</sup>There had been during the election campaign mob action in Sherbrooke and in Kitchener which broke up meetings held in the interest of government candidates. In Kitchener Sir Robert Borden was denied a hearing.

in Canada, Sir Clifford's career as a major factor in Canadian politics came to an end. He was in his 57th year, still relatively young, as age in public life goes. But he felt that he had earned the right to withdraw from the strain of sustained political activity. He never again was a prime actor in large political movements. He never again sought to impose or to defeat policies by the making or unmaking of governments. He passed into the company of the Elder Statesmen—a distinguished national figure to whom the people listened, when he chose to speak, with respect and attention.



## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### CONSERVATION AND INDUSTRIAL RESEARCH

#### I

"A patriot is one who heartily wisheth the public prosperity and doth also study and endeavour to promote it."—*Berkeley*.

SIR CLIFFORD SIFTON retired in November, 1918, from the chairmanship of the Commission of Conservation, after nine years of consistent public service. In May, 1921, the Commission was abolished by act of parliament; the ungracious dismissal being accompanied by grudging acknowledgments in the Commons by Mr. Meighen, the Prime Minister, of the services rendered by it. Mr. Meighen's argument was that the Commission had done valuable pioneer work in awakening public interest in the need of conservation and in giving advice as to developmental policies to be followed; but with the extension of services by the departments there was, in the opinion of the government, an overlapping of activities which should be ended. He said that it must have been the intention to create the Conservation Commission for a temporary purpose—to advise, in a broad way, policies of conservation; this having been done, the time had come for it to disappear. Even from Mr. Meighen's speech condemning the Commission to death, it is possible to learn something of the services which it rendered to the country. These services were in fact notable both in their range and variety; and the record of them is to be found in the shelf-full of annual and special reports issued by the Commission dur-

ing its term of office, which are still in use as authorities in their respective lines.

The Commission was not an administrative body; its functions were advisory and consultative. It was a body constituted for the purpose of collecting exact information about the natural resources of the country, and presenting it in a way to be of practical benefit; and for advising as to government policies for the effective conservation of natural resources. Upon it were represented the Dominion government and the government of each province; and to these were added twenty members appointed for their special qualifications. It operated through its executive staff in association with its chairman; and through special committees dealing with forests, waterways and water-powers, lands, public health, minerals, game and fur-bearing animals, etc. The annual reports are a testimony to the harmony and effectiveness with which this truly national body worked.<sup>1</sup> It carried out extensive surveys of the country's forest resources, and suggested policies that were adopted both by the Dominion and the provinces. It first compiled and made available information about the water-powers of Canada. Its series of reports covering the water-powers of each province in detail are still of high value. It carried on agricultural experiments designed to increase the

<sup>1</sup>Toronto *Saturday Night*, January 1, 1921:—"In regard to certain great problems, of grave and urgent concern, the Commission has shouldered the burden of creating, so to speak, a national conscience. It has initiated and guided the whole movement in Canada for town planning and for the scientific planning of land development, whether in urban or rural areas. It has given the lead in the campaign to reduce our huge annual fire losses. It has also led in the study of fuel and power problems. It has been responsible for Dominion-wide effort to conserve our diminishing resources in game, fur-bearers and other valuable wild life. Its efforts in connection with such matters as the illegal diversion of water by the Sanitary District of Chicago, and in the proposed private exploitation of the St. Lawrence River, have received international recognition and sanction. In these and similar cases, it has been necessary to focus attention upon problems that had hitherto almost entirely escaped serious consideration."



productivity of the soil that were afterwards incorporated in the methods of the agricultural department. Elaborate studies were made upon the most efficient possible uses of our domestic fuel resources.<sup>1</sup>

The outstanding service rendered to the Canadian people by the Commission of Conservation was, however, in the matter of protecting water-powers.<sup>2</sup> An account has already been given of the timely and effective intervention of the Commission of Conservation when, in 1910, attempts were made to get through parliament bills favouring the development of the Long Sault rapids by private interests, and also to get approval of the International Waterways Commission for the plans of the Long Sault Development Co. and the St. Lawrence Power Company, subsidiaries of the American Aluminum Co., which had an extensive plant at Massena, New York. In the memorandum drawn by Mr. Sifton and submitted to the meeting of the International Waterways Commission held in Toronto February 8, 1910, we find principles laid down which were in time to become the accepted Dominion policy on water-powers. There was, for instance, the declaration against the export of power with the reasons why this practice should not be continued:

"The suggestion that power can be generated on the American side, or generated on the Canadian side and exported to the United States, and that thereafter, when it is required in Canada, the Company can be ordered to deprive its United States customers of the power and deliver it in Canada, is regarded as being entirely illusory. If the power is used in the United States, industries will be built up and vested interests created thereby which it will be impossible to ignore. The attempt to enforce an order for the delivery of power on the Canadian side after it had for years been exported or used in the United States, would

<sup>1</sup>See speech by Dr. Béland in House of Commons, May 26th, 1921: *Hansard*, page 3961.

<sup>2</sup>See Chapter XII.

lead to serious difficulties. The case is not the same as if the company and its works were wholly within Canada. If the Company desired to avoid or resist such an order, no means would exist of enforcing it, without resorting to steps which would be a sure road to international complications."

The plans before the Commission and for which approval was being sought at the same time, by means of bills introduced in the Canadian parliament on behalf of a subsidiary Canadian company, were declared to provide for "the absolute monopolization of the whole power available from the rapids, with a minimum consideration of Canadian interests." There was no immediate need in Canada of power from the development of this section of the St. Lawrence; when there was this need the river should be damned, and half the power "permanently retained for Canadian use without any exception or qualification."

Following the defeat of this attempt to secure private control of an important section of the International part of the St. Lawrence river, the Commission published in 1913 a considered argument against the Long Sault project, with appendices containing all available information bearing on the enterprise.<sup>1</sup> The argument closed with a series of conclusions. The project was described as "giving a valuable asset, without any substantial consideration, to a foreign company for its private advantage." The plain duty of Canada, it was asserted, was "to maintain her rights of ownership and jurisdiction absolutely unimpaired and untrammelled." The Conservation Commission, by its resolute course during these critical years, rendered Canada services of a value not to be estimated. It saved the St. Lawrence international section from private exploitation; it stated an unanswerable case against the export of power which ultimately influenced water policy; and upon its recommendations the basic principle of the Dominion power

<sup>1</sup>Arthur V. White, M.E., Commission of Conservation, Canada: *Long Sault Rapids, St. Lawrence River*.



policy is based: that unconditional titles shall not be given and that every lease shall be conditional upon development with public control of rates and a revisable rental charge.

A memorandum re-affirming the policies favoured by the Commission was submitted by Sir Clifford to the Minister of Public Works, October 22, 1917, the occasion being an application by the Power Development Co. to carry out a water-power development at the Coteau Rapids. With respect to this application to dam the river the government was asked to take no action until the fullest opportunities were given for discussion. Fear that it was a development project looking to further export of power was expressed. Despite the objection filed by the Commission in 1910 a permit had been issued in 1916 under which there was being exported from the power development at the Cedar Rapids some 75,000 horse-power, to works of the Aluminum Company of America. By this export, Sir Clifford wrote, vested interests had been created on the basis of the use of this power, creating a situation which would give rise to serious embarrassment. "The industries and interests thus created are certain to look upon any attempt to withdraw the power from them as confiscation of their rights. They are quite certain to protest vigorously to their government against such withdrawal being permitted, and serious international complications may arise." Therefore no further export of power should be permitted. There ought to be no granting of private rights of the character sought by the application, until full consideration was given to the water-power situation in Ontario and Quebec. It would be improvident to create vested interests.

In his address as chairman at the annual meeting of the Commission of Conservation held in Ottawa, November, 1917, he spoke with directness about the St. Lawrence power situation and the need for definite policies:

“For myself, I have no doubt at all what ought to be done with respect to the great powers dormant in the St. Lawrence river. The United States government is not interested in the corporation that are endeavouring to get possession of the St. Lawrence powers from the other side. Neither is the Canadian government interested in the fortunes of the gentlemen who are promoting their projects on the Canadian side. They are very few in number, and their interests are confined entirely to themselves. What the United States government and the Canadian government alike are interested in is that there should be a fair division of this power, that it should be developed in such a way that the neighbouring and tributary population should have the use of it upon fair terms. A thorough study of the whole question inevitably leads to the conclusion that there is only one sound and satisfactory method of developing these powers, and that is by an international commission, under which the greatest and the best use of the powers will be made, the most economical development will be effected, a just and equitable division of the power will take place and the governments concerned will be able to administer the power as the Hydro-Electric Power Commission administers the power of Niagara, for the benefit of the people who are directly concerned in its use.

“This bold and progressive policy, if adopted by the government of Canada, will undoubtedly command the support of our people. It is not a case of advocating what is generally described as public or government ownership. We have here a peculiar set of circumstances giving rise to a problem that is capable of being solved in only one way, and common sense indicates that we should solve it in that manner. . . . It has become very plain within the last few years that hydro-electric power is the greatest of all factors in modern industry, and where any people endowed by nature with a vast supply of this essential element in modern manufacture, allow it to be monopolized and controlled in private interests, a sad awakening awaits them.

“Fortunately in the Dominion of Canada, we got down to serious business in time, and there has been no serious monopolization of great powers. While large powers have been developed by private companies, they have served a very useful purpose, and, in most cases, their rates have been reasonable. A serious danger, however, would arise



if, at that stage of development which we are now entering, these companies were allowed to combine their interests and, by acquiring a few great powers which are easily accessible, to institute a monopoly. This would be the most serious of all mistakes and must be prevented at any cost."

## II

From the time of its creation until 1917 the Commission of Conservation was the watchdog of the St. Lawrence, and other boundary waters. When applications came before it, the International Joint Commission, which had replaced the International Waterways Commission, was in the habit of asking the Commission of Conservation for an opinion. In August, 1918, the Aluminum Company, which supplied the armies with some sixty per cent. of their aluminum requirements, made application—with the strong backing of the United States Secretary of War—for additional power at Massena, to be supplied by constructing a submerged weir in the southern channel of the Long Sault. The concession was to be for five years or alternatively until the end of the war. When Mr. James White, the Secretary of the Conservation Commission, appeared before the Waterways Commission in Montreal, August 29th, to give the views of the Commission, he found a representative of the Dominion government, in the person of Hugh Guthrie, the Solicitor-General, also present. There had been no consultation between the government and the Commission, and their representatives spoke with different voices. The recommendation of the Commission of Conservation was explicit. It was opposed to the weir being constructed by a private company; but if the shortage of power at the aluminum works could not be otherwise met, it recommended that the weir be built by the two governments for war purposes, upon the engagement that the dam must be removed after the war at the demand of either government. "We are", said Mr. James White, "distinctly advocating

that any works such as this or any other works that are put in the St. Lawrence shall be put in by the two governments. That has been the position of the Commission of Conservation ever since its inception in 1910." Mr. White explained that Sir Clifford Sifton, who was in England, had cabled his approval to the recommendation.

The government, with the zeal which came from first contact with the question, had other ideas about how the matter should be dealt with. It did not put itself in opposition to the request; but it denied the right of the International Commission to deal with it. This was a case for high debate between the two governments. Mr. Guthrie and Mr. F. H. Keefer, M.P., who seconded his efforts, declared that the building of this weir would violate a provision of the Ashburton treaty, dated 1842. There must therefore be an amendment of the treaty. The Canadian representatives said that if the Washington administration would communicate with the Dominion government, settlement of the question would be expedited.

The Canadian government had the idea that instead of permitting the development of an isolated section of the river a general plan for joint development of the whole Long Sault section should be worked out between the two countries. The idea was quite sound; but the times were not propitious. The war was going on and the United States government which relied entirely upon the Massena plant for its aluminum war supplies, pressed for immediate action. It was pointed out by the applicants and by the representatives of the United States government that the plan of the Canadian government called for a treaty; even if a treaty could be drafted without delay it could not be validated until the Senate met in November. The Dominion government formulated its case by a formidable order-in-council which it drew up in the first week in September; this was forwarded to the Joint High Commission



and to the applicants and to the United States government. The International Joint Commission cut the debate short by unanimously agreeing on September 14th to the application upon conditions.<sup>1</sup> P. B. Mignault, one of the Canadian commissioners, afterwards a Justice of the Supreme Court, vindicated the right of the International Commission to deal with the matter in an elaborate argument.

This collapse of their plans was taken with tragical seriousness by influential members of the government. The International Joint Commission was beyond their reach; but the Commission of Conservation was available as a whipping-boy. It could be cuffed, booted, derided. The wounded *amour-propre* of the Ministers was seconded by the jealousy of departmental officials who had long resented activities by the Commission, which they regarded as trenching upon their preserves. The unfortunate secretary found himself in the pillory. Naturally Sir Clifford came to his defence. A series of letters passed between Sir Clifford and the government in which he asserted the independence of the Commission. If, he said, it had been understood that the Commission was bound to harmonize its views on public questions with those of the government, it would have found it impossible to create public opinion in support of its policies of reform. Moreover, most of the members of the Commission would have refused to serve on these terms.

<sup>1</sup>The scepticism expressed at the hearing by the representatives both of the Canadian government and the Commission of Conservation, as to the weir if built by the St. Lawrence River Power Company ever being removed, has been fully vindicated by events. The Commission on September 14th, 1918, approved of its construction temporarily, for a period of five years or until the end of the war. The company came back in 1922 and the approval was extended for a period of two years, with the proviso that the weir was to remain in place until the company was given six months notice to remove it. The six months notice has never been given. In 1928, the company asked permission to raise the weir six feet. This would have made it a dam, and not a weir, as the top would then have been above the surface of the water. This application has never been proceeded with, the hearing standing adjourned.

"The Commission of Conservation", Sir Clifford said in one of his letters, "has been fighting this matter for years. If it had not done so there would have been no St. Lawrence question now." The water powers would by this time have been hopelessly involved in private ownership and control. The contest has not been an easy one; it has been renewed in one form or another constantly and the officials of the Commission have been obliged to exercise ceaseless vigilance. This condition of affairs persisted up to the initiation of the present proceedings."

The Commission, having been notified, was under the responsibility of preparing its case; when the government for the first time decided to make representations, it should have advised or consulted with the Commission.

"The Commission was entirely in the dark, and was left to shoulder the responsibility of what might happen without any intimation that the government was definitely adopting a policy and had prepared to make the case its own. Under these circumstances the Commission rightly, in my opinion, proceeded to discharge its responsibility. I find no ground for censuring the officers of the Commission, who seem to have discharged their duty with zeal and discretion under circumstances of unusual embarrassment."

At the time this controversy was being carried on Sir Clifford was preparing to return to England. He had some final interviews with members of the government, and not finding their attitude satisfactory he, immediately before taking ship, wrote to the acting Prime Minister returning to him the commission which he had received from Sir Wilfrid

<sup>1</sup>Full recognition that it was the Commission of Conservation which blocked the development of the Long Sault by a United States private corporation was accorded at the August hearing by Leighton McCarthy, K.C. who appeared on behalf of the St. Lawrence River Power Company. "I have never been able to understand", said Mr. McCarthy, "how my Conservation friends can justify themselves for this system of objection and blocking things beyond a reasonable period. It is ten years now since it was proposed that this Company should develop the Long Sault. They said 'stop', and for five or six years they have been saying the governments ought to do it."



nine years before. He gave no reasons for his resignation; but this was hardly necessary.

This incident spelled doom for the Commission. In due time its destruction—no doubt resolved upon at this moment in certain minds—was carried out. In his address in parliament on May 26, 1921, supporting the measure abolishing the Commission, Mr. Meighen leaned heavily upon the charged impropriety of the Commission presenting views to the Joint International Commission which had not previously been given the departmental "O.K." "Surely", said the still indignant Prime Minister, "it never was the intention that the Conservation Commission should determine what should be said before the International Joint Commission, as representative of the views of the Dominion of Canada regarding the subject of international waters."<sup>1</sup> To this the appropriate answer is furnished by the observation of Sir Clifford, noted above, that if the Commission of Conservation had not done this very thing there would have been no application in 1918 before the International Joint Commission by the Aluminum Company; it would have had the entire power production of the Long Sault in its pocket eight years earlier. Mr. Meighen in his speech had a few kind words to say of the Commission of Conservation; but Sir James Lougheed, Minister of the Interior, in supporting the measure for its abolition in the Senate, had nothing but words of scorn and contumely.<sup>2</sup>

There was resistance, within and without parliament, to this massacre of the Commission. But Sir Clifford took no

<sup>1</sup>*Hansard*, 1921, page 3960.

<sup>2</sup>Sir James Lougheed in the Senate, May 13, 1921:—"It invaded the field of agriculture; dipped into external affairs by making representations at Washington; invaded the Department of the Interior by meddling with the administration of natural resources; took up the question of water-powers; extended its scope to the Department of Marine and Fisheries; dipped down under the earth and interfered with mines and minerals and finally, took a hand in the question of scientific and industrial research."

part in this attempt to save it. No good purpose, he considered, would be served, by his public participation in the defence. But privately he keenly resented the government's action, the responsibility for which he charged chiefly to Mr. Meighen. "The whole course of the government's conduct in respect to this subject", he said in a private letter, "is entirely discreditable."

### III

To this record of Sir Clifford's services as chairman of the Commission of Conservation there may very properly be appended a note about his ardent, long-continued advocacy of the establishment by the State of an institute of industrial and scientific research. His attitude on this question is another illustration of his consistently held view of the relationship that should subsist between the State and business. The State must not, save in exceptional circumstances, go into business, but it must be alert to provide conditions, so far as its powers go, which make possible the development of industry by personal or corporation enterprise. As Minister of the Interior he had to administer two sub-departments, the Geological Survey, and Mines, which were staffed with men of scientific attainments with aptitude for research. Dr. Haanel, the head of the Mines branch, had been an instructor in Victoria University in Sifton's student days; when his student became Minister of the Interior he transferred his services from Cornell University to the Canadian government. He was primarily a scientist of research, and he was encouraged in a wide range of experiments by his Minister. The knowledge which Sifton gained while Minister as to the relationship between research and achievement was widened by his experience as chairman of the Commission of Conservation. He came to certain definite conclusions. The natural resources and wealth of Canada would never yield the desired results,



until adequate facilities of research by which their advantages could be made available, were applied. Industry itself could not furnish these facilities; and in any case in private research there would be overlapping and secrecy. The universities were not suitably equipped and endowed.

Some worth-while research was being carried on by the Canadian government, through scientific sub-branches of various departments. Why not co-ordinate these activities and bring these branches together in a single institution, under expert direction, with increased facilities for research by the building of extensive well-equipped laboratories? Such an institution would be the recognized parent body of scientific research for Canada. With it every scientific school and organization would be in affiliation; it would supply facilities for post-graduate work; by the extensive employment of fellowships Canadian students at home and abroad would bring new stores of knowledge to the common stock. Such was the vision splendid that took possession of his mind. If he did not carry his plea for the establishment of this institution to the people by public addresses, he lost no opportunity in private life of expounding his views, and in particular to persons in positions of power and authority. If, for a fleeting moment in 1917, he toyed with the idea of being a member of the Union government, it was that he had in mind the possibility that he could make the establishment forthwith of the Institute of Central Research the condition of his acceptance. Discussing the possibility of such an institution became indeed something of a hobby with him; all his friends were familiar with his hopes and ambitions in this direction. The writer recalls very clearly an evening in Sir Clifford's home in England when, before the fire in his study, to a small but interested audience he opened up the subject. "Now", said a smiling member of his family, "he is well away for the evening."

When in 1916 the Canadian government, in response to an invitation from the British government to co-operate with it in the development of scientific and industrial research, began to look into the question, Sir Clifford seized the occasion to urge the Prime Minister to take up the work in a whole-hearted way by the establishment, at as early a date as possible, of the thoroughly equipped central institution which he had in mind. The research necessary for industrial development could not, he wrote, be done by universities. He would therefore be sorry to see the government wasting its efforts and money by bonusing research in universities. "A central institution equipped for post-graduate work and research is", he wrote the Prime Minister, "the only kind of an institution that will ever do useful work in that connection. I am convinced that it may be done in Canada as well as in any country in the world, but there is no use trying to do it in a half-baked fashion." Better, he suggested, wait until the war was over than to do something not adequate to the opportunity.

The government met the demand at this time that something be done by bringing into being the Honorary Advisory Council for Scientific and Industrial Research—a voluntary organization working under the direction of a chairman who gave only part-time attention to the work. Sir Clifford, while handsomely recognizing the good intentions and actual performances of the Honorary Council, regarded it as a quite inadequate approach to the solution of a great national problem. Speaking to the Conference on Scientific and Industrial Research held at Ottawa in February, 1923, under the auspices of the Canadian Manufacturers' Association, he said that in spite of the good work which it had done, the Advisory Council was not the kind of an organization that would give the country the service called for by its requirements; and he outlined to the conference his conception of a great central institution directing and



co-ordinating all the scientific research carried on throughout the country.

Though nominally attached to a department, the institution which he had in mind should, in his view, be controlled by a Board of twelve governors to be chosen with great care, under a chairman combining scientific achievements with administrative capacity. Ample funds in keeping with a plan to cover a term of years should be placed at its disposal. The governors should be scientific men of eminence from the faculties of the universities, business men of experience and engineers of standing. The actual working head should be a man of the highest scientific attainment. "Speaking generally, every branch of scientific work which comes under the auspices of the government in Ottawa should be brought under the institution and divorced from the departments in which the work is now carried on." The scientific branches of the various departments in such an atmosphere would become far more efficient. "Nearly every man in a scientific department would, under the arrangement that I have suggested, take on a new lease of life. Instead of being in charge of a lonely branch or sub-branch of the government service, getting no aid, assistance or management from anybody, he would at once become a member of a great and highly respected institution which in a very few years would achieve world-wide reputation, and he would become one of a circle of men engaged in the noblest work that men can do. I venture to suggest that once this organization were got under way you would hear no more of your scientific men resigning on account of inadequate compensation. No institution in any country in the world would afford a more alluring field to the scientific investigator."

The services which such an institution could render—as a post-graduate school, as the dispenser of fellowships, as an agency of research, as an advisor to developmental enter-

prises—were sketched in terms of enthusiasm, and he urged the government and the country to courageous courses:

“Let us hitch our chariot to a star. We can do what others have done. Germany brought about the greatest application of science to industry ever known in a comparatively short space of time. She has no natural advantages over Canada. Quite the reverse. Here we have the greatest natural workshop in the world, but it is as futile to expect that we can adequately and efficiently develop it without intelligent and comprehensive direction and advice as to expect a great factory to function successfully without a head.”

The gradual approach of the government's policy in matters of research to his plan, by the appointment of a permanent paid head to the Council, and the voting in 1927 of a large sum of money for the erection of laboratories and executive offices, was naturally a source of satisfaction to him. Twenty years after he first definitely formulated in his own mind the idea of a central institution of research there will be in Ottawa an approximation to his vision. This divergency in time suggests that Sir Clifford, on this question, outran his generation in courage and imagination.



## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

### CANADA'S RISE TO NATIONHOOD

"I am no more against Colonies than I am against the solar system. I am against dependencies when nations are fit to be independent. If Canada were made an independent nation she would still be a colony of England, and England would still be her mother country in the full sense in which those names have been given to the most famous examples of colonization in history."—*Goldwin Smith*.

TO the movement that in some thirteen years carried Canada from a position of definite subordination in an Empire revolving around a central government, to complete equality in a Commonwealth of British nations, Sir Clifford Sifton made a very considerable contribution. From the time of his return to take up residence in Canada in 1919, until the issue was virtually decided in 1926, Sifton was conspicuous in his advocacy of a policy of constitutional development. By contributions to periodicals, by public addresses, by statements to newspapers and by the exercise of his personal influence in quarters where it counted, he gave notable service to the cause. He had been one of the first to recognize that Canada had outgrown her colonial limitations. As we have seen, his conclusion after the Alaskan Boundary fiasco had been that in future international arbitrations affecting Canadian interests only, Canada should nominate the entire British panel and conduct her own case through—a position in which the claim for Canadian sovereignty was implicit.

During the war, on January 25, 1915, Sir Clifford Sifton in speaking to the Canadian Club in Montreal, declared

that by participation in the war Canada had, in effect, declared her nationhood.

"Canada, not forced by any law or rule has voluntarily taken part in this war, placing herself in opposition to great world powers. Canada has stepped into nationhood. No longer can we play the part of minors, who cannot transact our own business. Hereafter we shall not be allowed by the great nations of the world to put ourselves in that position. They will say that if we can make war we can do our own business and give our own answers to their questions."

Thus a question had been raised which would have to be settled after the war. In the same address he spoke of the inability of Canada to change her constitution without getting the consent of the Colonial Secretary and the British Parliament. "This", he said, "is the only method which eight million grown people have of amending their own constitution. For my part I say that it is an anachronism and an absurdity, and we must find some method by which we can amend our constitution as we see fit." This was about the first voice definitely raised by a Canadian public man in criticism of the limitation of our constitutional freedom imposed by the British North America Act.

Sir Clifford was therefore alert and interested when, the war being over, there were signs and portents of Canada's forthcoming enfranchisement, but through the earlier stages of this development he was somewhat fearful that things might not be what they seemed, but that Canada might be given a nominal enlargement of stature which would carry with it commitments that would in fact more strongly rivet upon her a state of actual subordination. All through the movement looking to the enlargements of autonomy there were two schools of tacticians. There were those who seized on every declaration looking towards equality and pushed its implications to the farthest limits, holding that the anomalies arising from the legal limitation fixed by the



constitution were rendered obsolete by these developments, and should therefore be ignored or, if this proved necessary, removed. Others, mostly of high legal attainments, thought this procedure irregular. They preferred to bring about constitutional changes by first changing the law by recognized political and parliamentary methods.

Upon the whole Sir Clifford belonged to the second class. His legal grasp of the question and his preference for accuracy in definition did not permit him to join enthusiastically in the loud, strident claims put forward by enthusiasts, upon the strength of the 1917 constitutional declaration, Canada's participation in the Paris conference and Canada's membership in the League of Nations, that Canada was a nation with all the attributes of sovereignty. The difference was purely one of tactics, not of policy. There was complete agreement that Canada's advancement to sovereignty should be furthered by all available means.<sup>1</sup> Sir Clifford would have preferred an advance by more orderly means. His desire was that the Canadian Parliament should recognize the need of complete autonomy, should take note of the anomalies and make provision for

<sup>1</sup>The writer, as editor of the *Free Press*—which took the line of claiming everything—had many discussions with him on this point. "The policy we follow here", said the writer in a letter to him, "is to assume that our national status is all that is claimed for it, and put it in strong contrast with our legal position as set out in the document. This lends irresistible force to the argument that the law must be modernized to suit the facts. The developments at Paris have made more apparent than ever the anomalous situation of the Dominion, and have reinforced powerfully the necessity for a new definition of our status. In the discussions in the United States Senate on the Peace Treaty, Senator Hitchcock said that in his opinion this concession of international status to the British Dominions was likely to break up the Empire. In the sense that as a consequence of this international status the relation of technical dependency upon Great Britain terminates, the senator was undoubtedly right. This is an inevitable consequence of the participation in the Paris conference by the Dominions and their further membership in the League of Nations. This participation in the Paris Conference has revealed the actualities of the situation. We cannot be at the same time a nation, and occupy a position of subordination to any other nation."

their removal and then request emancipating legislation by the British Parliament. Theoretically there was much to say for this course, but the practical argument against it which proved decisive was that progress by this road could have been indefinitely blocked by the influences, then powerful in Canada, that opposed all developments towards nationhood. It was not until the resounding success of that masterstroke in tactics, the negotiations under purely Canadian auspices of the Halibut Treaty, that he became fully reconciled to the irregular but highly successful methods by which the cause was advanced.

Sir Clifford, like other "autonomists", was disturbed about the Imperial Conference of 1921, which was called, as was openly avowed by its promoters, for the purpose of replacing the Imperial conference by some kind of an imperial executive providing central government. Winston Churchill, Secretary of State for the Colonies, speaking in April 1921, said: "This was a very important year in the life of the British Empire, for it would see the first Peace meeting of the Imperial Cabinet. It would not be like the old Imperial conferences but would be a meeting of the regular Imperial cabinet." Upon this statement being cabled to Canada, Sir Clifford Sifton in a letter to the writer, said:<sup>1</sup> "It is entirely evident that the dominant view in England is that they are going to take Canada in and make her responsible for everything the British Government does, and it will as a matter of fact be accomplished in a few months, unless there is a determined fight opened on the subject. We might as well open the fight now."

The course taken by the conference did not lessen his concern. Cabled reports of Mr. Meighen's attitude favouring a large measure of foreign policy based upon consultation, moved him to formulate his view of the course which in his opinion Canada must follow.

<sup>1</sup>All letters in this chapter, unless otherwise identified, were addressed to the writer of this book.



"With regard to Meighen's proposition about constitutional matters and foreign policy, I think he is hopelessly involved. He apparently does not see that his proposition makes Canada responsible for everything that is done by Great Britain or the Empire in matters of foreign policy. There is only one possible conclusion, and this might as well be faced, and that is, Canada will have to conduct her own foreign policy and let Great Britain do the same, neither having any responsibility for the other."

It will be noted that Sir Clifford from the outset held firmly that Canada's powers of self-government both with respect to internal and external affairs should be unlimited.

The declaration by the Conference that the "whole weight of the Empire should be concentrated behind common action in foreign affairs", in furtherance of which the opinion was also expressed that Dominion representatives should be "frequently associated with those of the United Kingdom", seemed to him to mark a retrograde step imposing limitations upon our existing state of autonomy. He was confirmed in this fear by statements made by Mr. Meighen on his return to Canada, by announcements in the British Parliament by Lloyd George and Lord Curzon, and by the obscurity of the arrangements made for Dominion representation at the Washington disarmament conference. The criticism somewhat current in Canada in October, 1921, that the United States Government should have issued direct invitations to the Dominions to send representatives, seemed to him wholly beside the mark. In his view the United States was under no obligation to issue invitations to Dominions that had not the courage to declare and enforce their rights to distinct representation. He wrote:

"No foreign country can be expected to recognize Canada in foreign relations until Canada has defined its status and declared its position. We have not defined our status. If we do not define our status we cannot expect foreign governments to do it for us. The fact that as between Great Britain and ourselves we conduct our own business

pretty fully but not altogether, has no relation whatever to foreign nations, and we have no business to expect foreign nations to embroil themselves in the settlement of domestic questions such as constitutional status between Canada and Great Britain. It is perfectly well known down here to people that are on the inside, that the United States Government fully intended and desired to issue direct independent invitations to the British self-governing Dominions. Necessarily, before doing so they had to consult the British Embassy, and they were given an intimation, probably in roundabout but none-the-less effective fashion, that the British Government did not desire independent invitations to be sent to the Dominions."

In letters at this time he kept stressing his view that Canada should formally establish her acquired status, not relying upon her recognition by British authorities of her enlarged constitutional powers but by direct action; thus in a letter dated November 8, 1921, he said:

"By interpretation and custom we have, it is true, arrived at a national status very different from what we had immediately after Confederation. It is, however, still absolutely and entirely true that there has been no definite changing of status—first with regard to the case of Great Britain's wars, in which we are technically involved whether they are small or great, and second with regard to our relations to foreign countries. This status cannot be changed by newspaper articles or speeches in Parliament. It must be changed by a definite, recognized official document of some kind. Our participation in the Peace Conference does not change it. India participated in the Peace Conference the same as we did. Nobody claims that India is an independent country or has independent relations with foreign countries. Supposing the case of India were not there to kill the claim, it would still be the fact that it is our business to get it settled and notify foreign countries. It is not the business of foreign countries to go to the trouble of finding out what our status is. Until we secure the exact definition of our status we have no grievance against any foreign country. I am beginning to think that the way of getting at this question is to submit a series of resolutions of a general character to the House of Commons,



and wind it up by perhaps a resolution for a committee to strike a plan calling a constitutional convention to determine the lines on which the constitution should be amended."

## II

The views thus indicated in November were set out in detail when Sir Clifford spoke to the Canadian Club at Ottawa on the "Political Status of Canada" in April, 1922. In this address he expressed his fears that Canada's freedom of action had been compromised by the proceedings of the Imperial Conference of 1921. He quoted from Lloyd George's statement to the British House of Commons in December that a policy of joint control of foreign affairs by Great Britain and the Dominions had been agreed upon. In this announcement the British Prime Minister had pointed out that the machinery for carrying out this joint policy would be the machinery of the British Government, the British Foreign Office and the British Diplomatic staff. The machinery, according to Mr. Lloyd George, must remain in London. "The advantage to us", said Lloyd George, "is that joint control means joint responsibility, and when the burden of Empire has become so great it is well that we should have the shoulders of these young giants under the burden to help us along."

Sir Clifford regarded the arrangement thus made as entirely impossible. He did not think the Canadian people would agree to it. It was to his mind the complete abandonment of the theory of Dominion autonomy as it had developed for fifty years. It meant that Canada might at any time be summoned by cable to take part in a war as the result of hasty decisions taken in London. He urged definite action by Parliament "to clear the ground". He cited various terms employed to define the position of the Dominions—"sovereign status" by General Smuts; "equal status" by Lord Milner; "equality of nationhood" by Sir

Robert Borden; "status of a nation" by Mr. Rowell—and agreed that Canada must be endowed with the full powers of government indicated by these terms. He admitted that there was general agreement that this should be the position of the Dominion, but this was not enough. Speeches could not alter Canada's status. "Our status will not be altered by speeches of General Smuts or our own Prime Minister or Mr. Lloyd George. It requires something more than that. It requires a constitutional instrument which shall specifically confer upon the Dominion of Canada complete sovereignty and national status. We also require in that instrument a body of provisions under which constitutional amendments may be made from time to time by defined method."

What was necessary, in his opinion, to "clear the ground" was an amended constitution. He suggested that Parliament should create a committee which, calling in representatives of the provincial government and experts, would draft the required document. "The instrument", he said, "might either take the form of a declaration of rights, or of an amendment to the British North America Act, which on being adopted by Canada should be submitted to the Imperial authorities, and to which they should be asked to give their consent. This being done, the deed would be fully accomplished." Adoption of the amended constitution by Canada might be secured by the direct vote of the electors, or by formal ratification by the Dominion Parliament and the provincial assemblies. Recognizing that there would be sharp differences of opinion as to the character of the amendment, he urged that the discussion should be approached in the spirit of reason and charity. He said:

"The condition of the world as the result of the Great War will be seen in ten or fifteen years to have been radically modified. In this changed world we shall have a place. In considering these constitutional questions we should try



and arrive at a conclusion as to the means whereby in the new world we can best fulfil our destiny of building up a new, strong, self-reliant young nation, in the country which has been delivered to our care. How can we best promote internal prosperity and international peace, which is the highest world interest? It is a great and important question. No people ever have a more serious question to decide than this. The discussion should proceed, in the words of the great Lincoln—with charity towards all and with malice towards none—without heat and without personal recriminations. We should have consideration for the opinions of those who do not agree with us, and at the same time we should have the courage to maintain our own opinions and to give our reasons for them. We should approach the subject with the determination that it shall be settled by the dry light of reason alone, and that when the decision is arrived at, whatever it may be, we shall accept it and settle down to work under the constitution which is finally adopted as good and loyal fellow citizens, whose duty is to co-operate with each other towards bringing about the best results."

There was further discussion of the question along similar lines by Sir Clifford in an article "Some Canadian Constitutional Problems" contributed to the *Canadian Historical Review* for March, 1922. In it he suggested the possibility of having the constitution revised by a constitutional convention, made up of delegates elected directly by proportional representation from districts fixed by Parliament. The need in any such modification of the constitution of safeguarding the rights of the minorities as determined by the British America Act was admitted. "No change", he said, "can ever be made which will in any respect diminish or impair these guarantees. To suggest any such change would be to court disruption of the Dominion. In considering the question of constitutional changes therefore it must be promised as a first and essential condition that all these guarantees should be protected."

In this article Sir Clifford took advanced democratic

ground. He questioned the right or the wisdom of the Prime Minister of the day, with his colleagues, agreeing without instructions with the decisions arrived at in conference with representatives of the other British nations by which "the national destiny would be profoundly affected." These matters should be settled by the people after full discussion. "Nobody", he said, "knew what the views of the Canadian people are. It is quite certain that the opinions of the people are only half formed or not formed at all. Ninety-nine out of a hundred electors have never considered the questions. Before they can form their opinions there must be full discussion in the Press and on the platform. The whole question is emphatically one for submission to the people."

The remarkable Chanak episode of September, 1922, when the Dominions received urgent invitations by cable to hasten troops to the Dardanelles for a fresh war with the Turks, seemed to Sir Clifford the confirmation of his fears and his prophecies. To him this was evidence that the central control agreed to at the 1921 conference was in full operation. "Four months ago at Ottawa", he wrote, "I said the Canadian Government was liable to get a telegram calling it to take part in a war in Asia Minor. It was taken as a joke but the telegram is apparently here." He was outspoken against the "ready-aye-ready" attitude of many of the Canadian people, and was strongly behind the Canadian Government's cool policy of consulting with Parliament as to the need or advisability of sending troops.

"In my judgment", he wrote further, "the whole question of autonomy versus entanglements in European and Asiatic wars must be fought out now. I do not believe the Canadian people will stand for the folly that is proposed. The whole thing is just what I expected. I have been saying that if Lloyd George was not put out he would have Europe in a blaze in a year. Anything more insane than his call to arms it would be hard to imagine."



Later in January, 1923, in an address to the Canada First League in Toronto, he gave it as his opinion that Canada by her refusal to respond to this invitation had prevented war. "Newspaper after newspaper joined in the cry encouraging the Government to commit itself. If it had done so what would have happened? If it had given way, Europe would be at war to-day." The incident confirmed him in his view which he thereafter freely expressed in his public addresses; Canada should not be committed to war until "the representatives of the people in Parliament decide that such steps should be taken."

In this address to the Canada First League he considered how Canada might bring her condition of subordination to an end. His statement showed that he had advanced somewhat from his plan of an early remodelling of the constitution. He suggested the passage by the Canadian Parliament of a declaratory resolution in some such terms as these:

"That the governing powers of Canada, as constituted by the British North America Act as amended and as altered from time to time hereafter by the people of Canada, ought to possess under the British Crown the same powers with regard to Canada, its affairs and its people, as the Parliament of Great Britain possesses in regard to Great Britain, its affairs and its people."

An Imperial Act giving effect to this resolution could he thought be got without difficulty. If such a resolution were adopted, and a declaratory act assenting to it passed by the British Parliament, it would be proper for Parliament at its leisure to take up the general question of amendments to the constitution. Some machinery would have to be provided for amending the constitution and dealing with matters as they arose. The advantages of this declaration and subsequent action were outlined. Canada would

remain in the Empire; and would have control over war and peace and over her own foreign policy. It would make possible the remodelling of the Canadian constitution at will. He scouted the suggestion that Canada could not stand alone.

In the way of the fulfilment of the programme thus sketched, there were two difficulties which bulked large in the minds of those who, on this particular question, were more realistic in their thinking than Sir Clifford was. There was first the impossibility of getting the Government to submit any such resolution to Parliament, and secondly, the still more certain impossibility of reaching in any reasonable period of time an agreement as to how the constitution should be amended. Progress along these lines was not, in fact, practicable. Fortunately, there was near at hand a demonstration of the effectiveness of the tactics of the "irregulars", which was to be so conclusive to Sir Clifford that he thereafter fell in with the plan of so undermining legal anomalies by the steady encroachment of constitutional rights that they would virtually fall by their own weight. The negotiation of the Halibut Treaty with the United States by the Mackenzie King government was a superbly audacious stroke which had astonishing consequences. Conditions of geography made the protection of Halibut in the Pacific waters a purely Canadian matter. No other British nation had or could have any interest in it. The Canadian Government thereupon insisted that negotiations should be Canadian throughout. The plenipotentiary was to be appointed by the King upon the advice of his Canadian Ministers (or so the Canadian Government claimed); the treaty was to be signed only by the Canadian plenipotentiary; it was to be ratified by the King solely on behalf of Canada. If the plan could be carried through it would establish two things: that Canada was constitutionally



equipped to attend to her own external affairs, and that the nation which was the other party to the contract would have to accept Canada as a principal.

In the end Canada triumphed over all the resistant forces: over the British Government, nonplussed by this procedure; over Sir Auckland Geddes, British Minister at Washington, who could not understand why he was not permitted to sign the treaty; over countless critics like the *London Times*, and Mr. Bruce, Prime Minister of Australia, who told the world that Canada could not make a treaty in her own right; and finally and most important of all, over the United States Senate which, having amended the treaty to make it applicable to the Empire, found it necessary to beat a retreat when faced by the positive refusal of Canada to execute the instrument until it was restored to its original form. Sir Clifford Sifton watched this performance with lively interest. While he gave no public statement, his private view was that the Canadian Government had no power to advise the King direct; that the King had appointed Mr. Lapointe, the Canadian representative, upon the advice of his British Ministers; that Mr. Lapointe, therefore, was a representative of the British Government and in consequence his signature was binding upon the Empire. As a matter of law Sir Clifford, with the other critics, was right. It was at this particular point that the King government, by insisting upon its constitutional right, blotted out the law, thereby creating a precedent which led to the formal recognition by the Imperial conference in the following November, of the right of the Dominions to make their own treaties.

Sir Clifford had a full appreciation of the character of the stroke and its consequences, as has already been noted, and this converted him to a belief in the efficacy of the indirect approach to the solution of the problem. In an address to the Women's Liberal Association in Toronto on

January 8, 1925, he paid full acknowledgment to the effectiveness of the methods followed by the Canadian Government. He said:

"In the case of the Halibut treaty, His Majesty, on the advice of Canadian Ministers, authorized ratification of the treaty, and the instruments of ratification were exchanged between the United States Government and the Canadian representative, who was directly empowered by the King. This was a great and momentous change. Notwithstanding the somewhat absurd attempt to belittle what has taken place, it is the plain and undoubted fact that for the first time it is clearly and definitely set forth and confirmed by precedent that the Canadian Ministers have the sole right to advise His Majesty on purely Canadian foreign affairs of a civil character, the sole right to designate the representatives, who alone shall sign for Canada, and the sole right to advise ratification when the proper time comes. This is a real achievement of which the Liberal party has good reason to be proud.

"Note further that the implications of this precedent are very wide. Once admitted that the Canadian Ministers alone can advise His Majesty the King on foreign affairs of a civil character, and the principle of equality of Nationhood between Great Britain and her Dominions, stands admitted on the record, except with regard to peace and war. In former addresses I dwelt on the fact that such equality did not exist, and that it was useless to say that it did exist. But *nous avons change cela*, and now though some details require to be cleared up, the essential principle is admitted and put in practice. Our constitutional status in civil matters is in principle at least complete and so recognized by foreign nations."

### III

Convinced that the effective line of advance would be by authoritative declarations of constitutional rights that would undermine the legal position, Sir Clifford displayed a lively interest as the 1926 Imperial Conference approached. Two occurrences had given added interest to the constitutional question. In March the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in the *Nadan* case had found



the Canadian legislation of 1887 forbidding appeals to the Privy Council in criminal cases *ultra vires*, because it was repugnant to the provisions of the Judicial Committee Act of 1833. Sir Clifford ventured to question the soundness of the finding. "The decision", he wrote, "appears to have been given by Lord Cave, whose authority as a lawyer is not high. For myself I think the decision is bad law, because His Majesty was a party to the Canadian statute abolishing the appeals, having assented thereto through the Governor-General. It seems to be a case where the whole Dominion of Canada has understood that these appeals must cease, and the Judicial Committee says they shall not cease. That raises an issue which will have to be settled and settled very soon. It can of course be settled in only one way."

Into the general election of 1926 a curious constitutional issue had been projected. Sir Clifford, owing to absence from the country, took no part in the election, but he recognized the issue as important. It was, as he saw it, whether the King's representative in Canada could exercise, with respect to granting a dissolution, a discretion which the King himself would not exercise in Great Britain. If he could, then there was evidently some variation in the status of the two countries. This being the question raised, he desired the defeat of the Conservatives who justified Lord Byng's action. Before leaving for England he advised Liberals who consulted him that if they could get the issue clearly before the people of Ontario, the Conservatives would be completely disappointed in their expectation of "sweeping" the province. The event justified his political sagacity in this respect.

He recognized that the Conference of 1926 afforded an opportunity for a great advance towards the goal which was already in view; and on the eve of its assembling drew up a memorandum of what he thought the Conference should accomplish, which was carried to London by a

representative of the *Manitoba Free Press*. The essential points of this memorandum may here be fittingly introduced:

"Nothing that the Conference does can affect the law as it stands: but it can properly declare the principles which are to govern future Imperial relationships, after which the parties interested in the modification of the law must take such steps as are necessary to obtain the required amendments.

"The Canadian delegation can, with propriety, take the position that the principle of equality of status, laid down by previous conference and accepted by the British government, does not operate; and cannot become operative without further declarations to be followed by the requisite legislation.

"The objective to be clearly kept in view is the securing of a declaration explicitly defining equality as meaning the supremacy of the Canadian parliament over all Canadian matters and questions, both domestic and external.

"What reduces the present claim of equality to a nullity and a mockery is the fact that the Canadian parliament is subject to the jurisdiction of the British Parliament, and that this inferiority is not theoretical but actual.

"Examples of this subordination are herewith given:

"The inability of Canada to exercise extra-territorial control over its nationals.

"The judgment of the Privy Council declaring the Canadian statute forbidding appeals in criminal cases to the Privy Council invalid because it conflicts with legislation of the British parliament, 1833 and 1844, and therefore comes under the condemnation of the Colonial Validity Act.

"Cases within the knowledge of the Dominion government where with respect to shipping matters, the over-riding British statute has been invoked to remove matters in dispute from the control of the Canadian authorities and place them under the provisions of the British law.

"The Canadian delegation should, therefore, demand the adoption of a resolution by the Imperial Conference affirming the supremacy of the Canadian parliament in all Canadian matters in some such terms as these:

"That the Dominion of Canada should of right be and is of equal status with Great Britain in the management of



its own affairs; and the Parliament of Canada and the Legislatures of the provinces should, under the British Crown, possess the same rights in regard to the management of the affairs of Canada, domestic and foreign, as the Parliament of Great Britain possess in regard to the affairs of Great Britain.

"Accompanying this there should be certain mutual engagements by the representatives of the British and Canadian governments. The British should, in keeping with the terms of the resolutions, agree forthwith to submit the necessary legislation to the British Parliament exempting Canada from the operation of the Colonial Validity and Merchant Shipping acts; and to secure the passage of such further necessary legislation as it may be requested to enact by the Canadian government.

"The Canadian representatives should undertake to have the legislation prepared at the earliest possible moment, following the consideration which will be necessary.

"We have put the case as though Canada were alone concerned, because a general declaration affecting all the other Dominions might be neither practical or desired.

"There are special reasons why a distinct declaration as to Canada may be advisable. We have in Canada the delicate question of minority rights embedded in the British North America Act; and it may be necessary for the quieting of apprehensions that there should be incorporated in the declaration an engagement that nothing therein contained shall subtract from these rights, with the further engagement that in the legislative adjustments there are to be made, the provisions defining these rights shall become a basic and unchangeable part of the constitution of Canada.

"If the Conference will make this declaration and the British government will enter into the necessary agreement to give legislative effect to the principles thus outlined, little more need be done by the Conference in the way of elucidation of the Imperial problem; for this agreement will indicate the proper solutions of other problems as they arise.

Thus it will be obvious that with the two governments on an equality of status, the Canadian Governor-General cannot be an official of the British government: he must (however he be appointed) be a Viceroy.

And so on, with respect to all possible activities by either government.

This does not in the least preclude co-operation be-

tween the two governments—their equality being established—to the extent and in the manner which may be mutually agreeable.

Equally it will be clear that Canada cannot be committed to participation in war by the action of the British government (or vice versa) even though it may be agreed that in the event of one country being at war the other is in a state of passive belligerency.

One British nation cannot by a treaty made with a foreign country, affect the self-governing rights of other British nations."

The achievements of the Conference, as set out in the Balfour Report, met with his somewhat qualified approval. "The declaration of equality of status is perfectly satisfactory. So are the provisions regarding the position of the Governor-General. The statement with regard to shipping is unsatisfactory; and suggests that the British are bent on maintaining the supremacy of the Shipping Act. The declaration about foreign policy is vague and in some respects unintelligible. It is evident that Balfour, who is a pastmaster in this business and a master of dialectical subtleties, has got his own way in regard to this particular matter." As the Balfour declaration had no legislative effect the next step, he pointed out, would be for the Imperial parliament to give effect to the declaration by an act, based upon the findings of the committee to be set up which as it affected Canada, would divest Parliament of authority, over her affairs domestic or external. The apparent purpose to retain the British Parliament as a medium by which changes in our constitution should be made was objectionable to him. This power should be taken over by Canada on some basis to be reached by agreement. On this point he wrote:

"I do not take an extreme view with regard to the rights of the Provinces, but I think it goes without saying that, when put in charge of our own affairs, it is quite



out of the question that the Dominion Parliament should be able to amend the constitution in such a way as to affect the jurisdiction of the Provincial Legislatures without their consent. As to whether the consent should be unanimous, which I would not advocate because that would nullify the provision, by a two-thirds majority, or by a simple majority, or by a popular vote, is a matter for consideration. I doubt if there will be any difficulty at all in dealing with Quebec if it is approached in the right way.

"When Canada is put in entire control of her own affairs by the instrument which gives her that control, a statement should be made setting forth the constitutional guarantees which at present exist, with a declaration that these guarantees are assented to by every Province and that they are the basis and condition of Confederation. These guarantees would be as definite and complete, and as incapable of being upset as it is possible for anything in human affairs to be."

So far as the records go this was the last occasion upon which he discussed these questions; and his opinions as here recorded show his final views. He had stood steadily for many years for the complete legislative independence for Canada, by the formal renouncing of control by the British Parliament; and for the fashioning of machinery by Canada by which the Canadian constitution could be adjusted and made over to meet changes, with full protection for the fundamental provisions of the Confederation Act. This objective is not yet fully achieved but the end is near. When the books are finally closed and the honours adjusted, Clifford Sifton will rank high among those by whose vision, courage and devotion Canada was dowered with the gift of nationhood.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

### AS ELDER STATESMAN

The basis of my liberalism is this. It is the lesson which I have been learning ever since I was young. I am a lover of liberty; and that liberty which I value for myself, I value for every human being in proportion to his means and opportunities. That is a basis on which I find it perfectly practicable to work in conjunction with a dislike to unreasoned change and a profound reverence for everything ancient, provided that reverence is deserved.—*Gladstone*.

THERE was in the movement which brought about union government a strong infusion of political idealism. The people turned from the stresses and trials of the war to the vision of a new and better world which was to be the reward of their sacrifices. A political movement which broke with the political past, with its bitter partisanship and senseless blood feuds, seemed to offer a fulfilment of these hopes of a better day. An evidence of this spirit which was abroad in the land was the publication in the year of union government of a volume of essays *The New Era in Canada*, in which a number of Canadians sketched the lines of advance as they foresaw them.<sup>1</sup> Sir Clifford Sifton's contribution to this volume was in the spirit of pure idealism. "Surely we may hope", he said, "that a young nation born amidst the shock of warring peoples, a nation whose sons have sprung to arms at the call of the oppressed and who have made the supreme sacrifice for human liberty, will not fail to scrutinize closely the principles of its policy, and strive to cast out everything that threatens its moral health."

<sup>1</sup>*The New Era in Canada*, edited by J. O. Miller, Toronto: J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1917.



While our sons have been fighting in Europe", he added, "the moral leaven has been working at home. Assuredly these strivings will be followed by momentous results."

For this new nation he foreshadowed many reforms. Parliamentary representation should be improved by the adoption of proportional representation. Political patronage could never be abolished, but it should be reduced by bringing the outside service under the civil service act, and by extending the powers of the commission. Practical suggestions were made for the discouragement of the use of money for corrupt purposes in elections. "This evil", he said, "is the bane of democracy; it is the nightmare of every man in public life who is anxious to give good service to the state." "Why", he asked, "should we wait for any more public scandals before we reform this evil? There was no distinction in regard to this matter between the political parties. All the parties use all the money they can get." He urged legislation making it a criminal offence for any incorporated company, public contractor or any civil servant to give money for political purposes, or to reimburse anyone who has so contributed with provisions for enforcement.

As to the enforcement of such legislation this was his suggestion:

"Appoint two public prosecutors with the same tenure of office as a High Court Judge, one to be named by the Prime Minister and the other to be named by the leader of the Opposition. These prosecutors will be sworn to enforce the law, and to prosecute for every offence where evidence can be procured to warrant it. They should be entirely independent of each other, having each the power independently to prosecute to conviction for any offence against the act. They should be required, under a penalty, to investigate every case of alleged infraction of the law brought to their attention by a statement in writing from anyone whatever, and they should be required to report the result of every such investigation to standing committees of the

Senate and of the House of Commons. Such reports should state the result of the investigation, the result of the prosecution, if instituted, and, if prosecution has not been instituted, the report should state the reason why. Trial should not be by jury, but by a special tribunal of three judges.

"The Senate should be strengthened by fixing an age limit for members, and by providing for a number of ex-officio members to be drawn from the ranks of the elder statesmen. For the furtherance of these and other reforms Canada should have machinery by which the constitution could be amended at will. "The absence of such machinery keeps throwing us back continually on the past. It blocks reform. It sterilizes political thought and action. It should be the ambition of the young men to build an 'ideal state', which was described as one 'in which all the citizens, without exception, have the opportunity of living a sane, clean and civilized life, partaking of at least all the necessary comforts provided by modern science, and enjoying the opportunity of spiritual and intellectual improvement.'"

Hopes and dreams such as these, which were part of an emotional movement, of which the popular demand for national government was one manifestation, faded into the light of common day, when the guns fell silent; and there followed a moral "let down" which took the direction all over the world of repudiation of the political heroes of the war. Union government in Canada, like governments elsewhere, suffered from this shock of popular disillusionment; and the peace treaty had scarcely been signed before the movement, of which it was the symbol, was in full process of disintegration. It had in fact done its work in enabling the Canadian people, at a critical moment of the war, to declare anew their devotion to the cause; in giving a reasonably efficient and progressive administration during the closing year of the war; and in affording representation to both parties in the Canadian delegation to the Peace Conference.

But it early became evident that the government would not hold together to deal with the difficulties of the period



of reconstruction. Sir Clifford Sifton, when on a visit to Canada in the latter months of 1918, described it as "essentially a Tory government with an infusion of Liberal brains"; and in the following summer when he returned to Canada to take up residence he made it known to his friends that, with the war over and new questions arising, he believed that new political groupings were imminent and desirable. He foresaw that Sir Robert Borden would seek the "honourable discharge" which he had declared himself ready to accept in the difficult days of 1917; and the reconstructed government, in his opinion, would be in succession, not to the union government, but to the government which it had displaced.

Sir Clifford knew where, in the inevitable re-alignment he would stand. He had no intention of formally allying himself with any political organization; but he identified his place as definitely to the Left. His remarkable faculty for dealing with matters as they were, and letting the dead past bury its dead, was never more strikingly displayed. His mind was washed clean of the feelings and the issues which had dominated it in 1917; and looking forward to the tasks of reconstruction, he was prepared to establish sympathetic relations with those with whom on the war issues he had broken lances. Undoubtedly study, observation and reflection during the long years of the war had clarified Sir Clifford's thinking about fundamental political principles; and he found himself, as he faced the new post-war conditions, friendly to the policies avowed by Mackenzie King, the newly elected leader of the Liberals, and still more sympathetic to the formless, spontaneous radical uprising which became known as the Progressive movement. He made the same remark to many friends upon his return from England in 1919. "I have recovered", he said, "the radicalism of my youth." Thereafter, to the extent that he took part in public affairs, he was definitely of the Left.

though his views were too tempered by his experience and his temperament to be regarded as radical, judged by contemporary standards.

As the country progressed towards a general election he showed increasing interest in public affairs. Towards many of the government's actions his attitude was sharply critical. He thought the government's financial policies wasteful and extravagant, at a time when the need was for drastic retrenchment. He objected strongly to the policy of extending credits to Roumania and Greece for the purchase of Canadian grain, textiles and machinery; and denied with some heat newspaper reports that a business organization with which he was connected had an interest in these credits. "It was sheer nonsense", he wrote, "to be inflating the situation and raising prices by government credits, to manufacturers who already had all the export business they could legitimately attend to." After Mr. Meighen became Prime Minister he commented upon the great energy and capacity he was showing in trying to strengthen his position; but he thought the general course of the government, particularly in its relation to "big business", would be reactionary. The building by the government, after the war, as a relief measure, of a fleet of merchant vessels at peak prices, seemed to him an utterly indefensible proceeding; every dollar of the seventy millions thus laid out would, he predicted, be lost.

In the election campaign of 1921 he took no part, though he made one public appearance. When Mr. T. A. Crerar, the leader of the Progressives, addressed a mass meeting in Toronto in November, he accompanied him to the platform and, by his presence, indicated his general sympathy with the Farmers' movement. This did not mean that he subscribed to the Farmers' platform; on many points his views were in conflict with that ingenuous document. But his estimate of the situation was that a considerable suc-



cess by the farmers was necessary if a government of Liberal tendencies was to be brought in. He realized that there was a great army of voters, unionist in 1917, who did not want to vote for Mr. Meighen's government, and were equally disinclined to vote Liberal. He saw in the Farmers' movement much more a bursting forth of political independence than an organized agrarian movement; it afforded, in Ontario and in the West, a tarrying place for unionist electors who were disillusioned and disgruntled. He regarded the Progressive movement as a means of canalizing this sentiment, and carrying it to a point where it could fuse with the Liberals to create a formidable party of the Left; hence his open manifestation of sympathy. He hoped for a coalition between the Progressives and the Liberals to form a strong government with progressive and advanced policies commanding ample support in parliament.

The policies which he particularly hoped such a government would formulate and enforce had to do with reduction of expenditure; with the solidifying and strengthening of the railway systems which had come into the possession of the country, thus removing all danger of their absorption by the Canadian Pacific Railway which he regarded as possible if the Conservatives were returned to power; and a remodeling of the tariff. His views on the tariff in 1921 were not unlike those which he held when he first became a Dominion Minister in 1897. He believed that a compromise tariff which would be of substantial benefit to both east and west could be worked out satisfactorily. Substantial changes could be made in the tariff which would lighten taxation. The country would be better off, he believed, if there were heavy cuts in the duties on sugar, rubber goods, enamelware, hardware and other lines of large consumption.

Sir Clifford expressed himself as "very much disappointed" that, following the election of December 6, 1921, "a strong government that would grapple with the problems

that are pressing for solution" was not formed by a union of the two groups. He thought the efforts to this end which had been made had not been carefully planned or skilfully carried out. He had deprecated Mr. King's repeated statements during the campaign that he would not be a party to a coalition; and he attributed the failure of the attempts to get the parties together to his reluctance to realize with sufficient promptitude that a coalition on something like equal terms was called for by the circumstances. Promptly upon the result of the election being declared he made his views known to the writer. "Unless", he wrote, "King offers a coalition with Crerar on a fifty-fifty basis, with a definite recognition of the fact that Ontario and the West has an equal representation, and a definite recognition of needed policies, Crerar should stand out." He doubted, however, whether a coalition offer would be made. "I am", he said, "entirely assured that the present view of those in control of the Liberal organization is that they should sit at the head table, and the Farmers' organizations should take whatever crumbs are offered to them."

These views were not of simply academic interest. There were negotiations at Winnipeg which were transferred to Toronto and then to Ottawa, looking to the entrance into the government of some of the farm leaders; and though he took no direct part, Sir Clifford was consulted by some of the parties to these negotiations. He was favourable to a coalition if one could be formed; but he doubted whether any good would come from the absorption by a Liberal government of one or two Farmer leaders. These were the only terms offered; and they were declined. Mr. King formed a strictly party government and, with a bare majority of one over possible opposition combinations, embarked upon his career as Prime Minister.

This situation was regarded by Sir Clifford as unsatisfactory. The absence from the government of representa-



tives of the Progressives would, he feared, give "the influential group from Montreal" too much power. He doubted whether such a government could successfully cope with the problems presenting themselves for solution. As for himself he would, he said, decline to avow himself a supporter of the government. The attitude of independence thus announced he strictly adhered to during the first term of the King administration.

## II

Sir Clifford Sifton, watching events in the post-war world, saw many things done by the victorious nations that he regarded as a rejection of their moral obligations. As matters seemed to him, there was everywhere a revival of the old spirit of aggression which the war was thought to have exorcised. In his correspondence during the years following the war there often appeared a blistering comment upon courses pursued by these governments which were to him a negation of the principles which the war had been fought to establish. Thus, he attributed the continuance of hostilities directed against the Turks by Greece to the instigation of the victorious powers still intent on carrying through plans of aggression in the Near East. The Black-and-Tan campaign in Ireland filled him with loathing. "I am", he wrote in 1920, "entirely disgusted and fed up with the conduct of the British in Ireland. As I am of bigotted Protestant Irish descent you may guess it has taken something to bring me to this state of mind."

He was equally savage about a campaign being carried on at the same time in Mesopotamia. It would, if persisted in, alienate the Mohammedans of the world, and throw aside the fruits of a hundred years of statesmanship. The Egyptian question interested him; he was in favour of Egypt for the Egyptians, but they had no right to the Soudan.

"As you know", he wrote, "I am never in favour of British aggression abroad and generally see the native side of the question and sympathize with the underdog, but this is a case *sui generis*. The Soudan is not a part of Egypt, except that it contains the sources of the Nile. It is racially distinct, and the demands of the Egyptians for the Soudan is based on two things; the desire to annoy Britain, and the desire of a rascally official class of native Egyptians to get their hands on the spoils of the Soudan. I think it would be next door to a crime for Great Britain to let go in the slightest degree."

His lack of faith in the bona fides of the claims made by the great nations of devotion to the cause of peace made him very critical of the League of Nations. His attitude towards it was very like that of the American Liberals, who could see in it nothing but an instrument for carrying out the purposes and desires of the great powers. "The League of Nations is a preposterous and expensive farce, and amounts to nothing more than part of a machine designed to involve us in European and Imperialistic complications. Canada ought to call a halt on this business and do it at once." This was his view in November, 1920. He thought there was a danger, if Canada accepted membership in the League with its attendant responsibilities, and the United States stayed out, that something might arise which "would get us foul of the United States, which would be the worst misfortune that could happen to us." Canada's foreign policy, in his view, was to avoid unnecessary trouble with the United States.

He was deeply interested in the Disarmament conference which met in Washington in November, 1921; and he hailed with enthusiasm the definite proposition by Mr. Hughes, on behalf of the United States, for drastic reductions in naval armament. This was his immediate comment as set out in a letter:

"This proposal of the United States is the finest thing



I remember in international affairs. There is no doubt it has been made in the face of tremendous domestic opposition in the United States, and every effort will be made to try to get Hughes to modify his plan and whittle it down until it means nothing. The proposal will be welcomed with joy by every reasonable and disinterested man in England; but the strength of the armament and munitions clique is tremendous, and every effort that they can make will be bent towards preventing this programme being carried out in good faith. The strongest card against their machinations will be a determined uncompromising demand on the part of leading organizations of public opinion in Canada in favour of the United States proposal. My view is that the proposal should be accepted whole-heartedly and without any quibbling over details."

While the Washington Conference was in progress there met in Toronto in December 1921 the American Association for the Advancement of Science. One of the principal addresses delivered before the gathering was by Sir Clifford on "National Resources and National Welfare". He turned aside for a moment from his theme to pay a warm compliment to the United States for its leadership in the conference.<sup>1</sup>

"Few people ventured to express real confidence that the result of the conference would be appreciable. The conference met. Secretary Hughes, speaking for the United States, great, rich, powerful, self-sufficient and independent, the only man in the world whose position enabled him to deal with the crisis, walked into the conference and deliberately and relentlessly put the axe to the root of the tree. In one short hour he pronounced the doom of militarism and the armament craze, and laid the foundation for an enduring programme of peaceful development. Despite all obstacles, confounding all predictions, the conference has been a magnificent success. It has not done everything that the mind of men can conceive; it is still struggling with difficulties; but when it adjourns it will have done more for humanity than any conference of statesmen in the history

<sup>1</sup>The whole address was published in the *Manitoba Free Press*, January 5, 1922.

of the world so far as we know. You are the citizens of a great country which has recorded these achievements in its recent history."

The hope was expressed by Sir Clifford in letters written at this time that one of the results of the conference would be to free China from the overlordship of outside nations. "Any attempt by the British or French", he wrote, "to maintain the present overlordship in China, should be resolutely opposed, and China should have a clean start and be permitted to govern herself." After examining the reasons why events should take this course he claimed that Canada was especially interested in supporting China's demand for freedom from external control. "Canada is very much interested in this because in her attempt to trade with China, which is an important field for us, we want the open door and no special concession to anybody."

With his feeling that behind seemingly idealistic policies aggressive imperialism often lay masked, it is not surprising that he took instant alarm when the League of Nations Assembly produced in its 1924 session the protocol to the Covenant of the League. This was received with enthusiasm by the Assembly, including the representatives of the Dominions; but Sir Clifford at once put his finger on the weaknesses in the document which led to its rejection a few months later by Great Britain, the British nations and many of the lesser nations of Europe. He prepared and submitted to the writer, for editorial purposes, a searching legal interpretation of the protocol. One of the points which he stressed was that the protocol so enlarged the powers of the Council of the League that it could intervene in the domestic affairs of a nation, despite the protection of the covenant, if some other nation chose to regard its domestic policies as trenching upon its dignities or interests. This was a point about which controversy raged, but there was no escaping the conclusiveness of Sir Clifford's analysis. After a long



and careful dissection of the clauses widening the powers of the Council, he concluded with a forecast of what might be possible under the protocol:

"Let us get to cases. Japan objects to our anti-Jap laws. She serves us with an ultimatum, having waited until Great Britain has her hands full somewhere else. We decline to act and claim that our Immigration laws are our exclusive domestic concern. Japan presses. We go to the League. The League refers it to the World Court. The World Court decides in our favour. Japan brings it to the Council. The Council, largely under the control of small European nations whose scholars and professors are in scores around Geneva, finds that Japan is not alone in her feelings. More than half the countries in Europe are smarting under Anti-Immigration laws, especially those of the United States. The feeling is that the natural resources of the world ought to be open to the people of the world, and raw materials equitably distributed. The Council finds against us. Where are we? Italy follows it up by asking that we make our laws so as to facilitate the export of certain raw materials which she wants. Switzerland joins her. Where are we?

"The vice of this thing is that it invests the Council with virtual jurisdiction to interfere in domestic questions.

"The real question which we have to decide is: Is the danger too remote to be worthy of serious consideration? I don't think it is. Japan is sore to the heart over the action of the United States, and it would be a clever move to start by squeezing Canada into a corner and getting our laws amended, playing on Great Britain's unwillingness to have trouble with Japan. France doesn't care about the question at all. She lets in Moors and Senegalies. She should be just as likely as not to support Japan in the League, and Great Britain at heart has no sympathy with our anti-Japanese legislation. My considered opinion is that the British dominions should get together and unite in a declaration that they are willing to ratify the protocol after it has been amended, by declaring that neither by the Covenant nor the protocol has the Council or the Assembly any authority to make a finding or recommendation, to deliver an opinion, or authority on Arbitration, or in fact to in any way entertain jurisdiction of a question which the World Court holds to be domestic."

## III

Until they were shadowed by private sorrows the years following 1919 constituted one of the happiest periods of Sir Clifford Sifton's life. He was free from pressing business responsibilities; and he was able to give ample time to what was always the first interest of his life—the study, consideration and discussion of public affairs. During these years he was in constant requisition as a speaker to public bodies and upon special occasions; and his addresses for these occasions were prepared with great care. The only available records of his speeches during his long public career are in official publications and the public prints; there was not found in his papers a single manuscript of any address he ever delivered prior to 1920. From that year onward, however, he prepared and filed away manuscripts of all his more important addresses.

Further, he was more active than ever before in his association with the *Manitoba Free Press*. During these years, to a much greater extent than previously, he was a factor in the making of editorial policy, filling virtually the role of consulting editor. From his addresses, from memoranda prepared by him for editorial purposes, and from his private letters there could be compiled a wide-ranging and extensive volume of informed and searching comment upon the problems of the time. There will be space here, however, for nothing more than brief notations of his views upon questions of large interest which still engage the public attention; these are herewith made in the belief that they will be of value to Canadians, who are concerned, as he was, to find solutions for our pressing problems.

Perhaps at the moment of writing (July 1931) his views upon the need of immigration, the kind of immigration needed and the way to get it, have little bearing on the subject; for Canada has for the time being so completely repudiated her traditional policy on this question that the



Minister of Immigration has justified maintaining a large departmental staff by the plea that to keep people out of Canada requires the services of large numbers of men. But this is a complete reversal, owing to changed world conditions, of the policy of encouraging immigration of certain kinds, which was pursued for the ten years following the war. The reasons behind the desire for more population were apparent. The country was heavily burdened with debt; it had on its hands as well a vast railway system which could not pay its way. An increase in the productive capacity of the country would help in both respects. The quickest results in the enlargement of national production could be got from agriculture; and there was a very definite feeling in the country in the years after the war that an extensive programme of settlement and colonization in the West should be planned and carried out. The world, recovering from the losses of the war, would be hungry—so the Canadian public thought—for food, for lumber and for raw materials of all kinds. No one could foresee a development of the spirit of economic nationalism to the point where European countries, which had been eager to get Canadian wheat, would embargo its importation by prohibitive tariffs to compel their people, despite their poverty, to consume native but inferior foodstuffs at three times the price of the good Canadian article. There was therefore an insistent demand that something approaching the great Sifton plan of western settlement, which had brought prosperity to Canada twenty-five years before, should be put into operation. "I can tell you", Sir Clifford wrote in December 1922, "that the business men of the East are intensely interested in this matter of immigration, and if the King government makes a failure of it as it is at present doing, the brains and capacity of the country will turn against them. This is a matter that will not wait."

There was an instinctive turning to Sifton for suggestions

and advice; and he had no objection to making his views known, which he did by public addresses, by articles in publications and by more direct representations to interested parties. He envisaged the problem and its solution as not dissimilar to the problem with which he had dealt as Minister. The only desirable immigrants were people who would work on the soil and would be content to stay there. Immigration of the necessary quality could not be got from Great Britain.

"The farmer class", (he wrote on November 18, 1920) "will not emigrate. There is left only the agricultural labourer; they are a diminishing quantity. Their wages have lately doubled and they are going to stay up. Remain only the mechanic, the artisan, and the drifter in the southern towns. The worst blunder on earth would be to encourage their immigration. They are hopelessly incapable of going on farms and succeeding. The place to look for immigrants is Belgium, Denmark, and in a greater degree Norway and Sweden. From these countries the best agricultural settlers can be procured, who are perfectly competent when they arrive in Canada to take care of themselves and never want any assistance from anybody. I believe 100,000 first-class farmers could be got in the next two or three years, and they would be worth a million immigrants of the usual drifter class."

These were desirable settlers for high-class land; for the development of the areas of second-grade land he still pinned his faith to the Central European. He was quite explicit in the expression of his views. Speaking to the Westerners Club of Montreal in February, 1923, he said:<sup>1</sup>

"In northern Ontario, Manitoba and Saskatchewan we have enormous quantities of land perfectly fit for settlement. These are not lands on which the ordinary Englishman or American will go, but they are fit for peasant settlement. Twenty years ago I settled a number of European peasants on these lands, and those are the only parts where the people are not in debt. They have never left the land, and bankers

<sup>1</sup>*Manitoba Free Press*, February 27, 1923.



agree that these European peasants have made the most successful settlers. If you are to settle the rough lands you have to settle them with these people, because the average young Canadian or American farmer will not do it. There are tens of thousands of these peasant settlers in Hungary, Bohemia, and Galicia who can be obtained, and if settled they will stay there. They don't know any other business in the world but that of extracting their living out of the soil. These people have not got as high standards of living as we have, and there is a great deal of nonsense talked about lowering the standard of living if these men are brought in. Well, you have to put these men who will be satisfied with the standard of living associated with that class of country there or, leave the land untilled. It will have to be the standard of living of the pioneer."

Designing colonization schemes calculated to make the prairie blossom as the rose was the occupation these years of many minds—some purely theoretical, others practical in the sense that particular interests were to be served. A collection of these plans as published was made and submitted to him for review. His comment was terse:

"All these schemes without exception are based on the idea of the government paying money, sometimes on a large scale, sometimes on a small scale, but it is the old story of depending on the government instead of the individual. In my experience I have never known anybody who was materially assisted by the government to amount to anything, and I am extremely distrustful of any kind of a policy that has this for its basis. I think it would be entirely proper and judicious for the government to clear all the scrub land that they propose to offer for settlement. It might be that in the course of the clearing off, a log cabin and a stable might be put up. This is absolutely as far as I would go with government help, and I would not under any circumstances bring an individual to Canada who could not pay his own fare."

This idea was elaborated in a memorandum which he drew up for a Federal Minister. He suggested that the government should plan and carry out a colonization

scheme covering the north country from the St. Lawrence to the Rockies, with the co-operation in the East of the governments of Ontario and Quebec which owned the land. The quarter section should be the unit of settlement. A portion of each quarter section should be cleared and a log house and stable built. For these locations immigrants, in each case married with a small family, should be sought in Central Europe—Hungarians and Bohemians preferred. "In the case of Quebec, I would not bring Europeans. Work it in Quebec as a repatriation scheme. Also in Ontario I would give any bona fide married farmer first chance of an entry." The scheme should be developed slowly but steadily—five hundred sections in each province the first year, one thousand the second; and so on in an ascending scale. "In Manitoba there is a lot of rough scrub wooded land between Lake Manitoba and Lake Winnipeg, also on the west side of the northern part of Lake Manitoba. This land is rough but fertile. It will be a generation before it is settled if it is not taken hold of in the way I suggest." Elaborating his scheme he wrote:

"I would if necessary give each settler a couple of cows, a couple of pigs and a few hens. Charge this against the land as a lien and require it to be paid off at the end of three years. You would not lose a single dollar. This scheme is perfectly practicable and could be going in full blast in three months. It is about the most important thing in the way of settlement in Canada, because if you started it and ran it for two years, after that it would double up like a snowball, and in ten years this whole northern country would be settled, at least that portion of it which is fit for settlement." And in conclusion he remarked:

"Understand, none of this has any reference to government bonuses, which I detest. It is all on a business basis. I don't mind telling you that it sets me wild to see year after year passing and nothing done to handle these things which are simple as the rule of three. There is nothing to prevent it being done, and I am convinced that if you people do not do something like this your time will be short."



The policies of exclusion, now so popular and seemingly so justified by conditions, will nevertheless be temporary in application. The history of Canada shows that the country never got rich by keeping people out; the periods of prosperity have invariably been those when immigrants of the right kind were invited and made welcome. Those times will return and when they do this brief record of Sir Clifford's opinions may prove of service.

#### IV

Sir Clifford's views upon the railway problem, created by the collapse of the private companies, apart from the Canadian Pacific, were conditioned largely by his early experience in Manitoba and by the commitments to the public that he had entered into by the policies which he had supported as a Dominion minister. As has been seen he saw advantage to the public in the taking over of the Canadian Northern, when its daring and highly speculative policies ended in 1917 in a smash; but he questioned the wisdom of the absorption of the Grand Trunk system proper. He would have preferred to see the country with three systems: The Canadian National, comprising the Canadian Northern, the Grand Trunk Pacific, and the government lines; the Grand Trunk, privately owned but in alliance, by traffic agreement, with the Canadian National; and the Canadian Pacific. He carried with him from his early Manitoba experiences, a profound fear of railway monopoly and a firm belief in the value of competition. With the Canadian railways divided into two systems, he was deeply concerned that they be kept apart. For many years he feared a merger with the Canadian Pacific in control of the monopoly; later he was even more fearful lest the State should take over the Canadian Pacific.

The charms of consolidation, as pictured by various public ownership enthusiasts, left him cold. Consolidation

meant monopoly; and he knew what monopoly was. Lord Shaughnessy's proposition of 1921, looking to a consolidation in management with the C. P. R. virtually in charge, was alarming to him. Such a merger, he said, would create a monopoly of management and service that would be intolerable, and "would create a monster of patronage and financial power which would dwarf everything else in the country, the government among the rest." His anxiety over the elections of 1921 arose largely from his fear that the Shaughnessy plan or something like it would be carried out if the Conservative government were returned to power. He sought personal assurance upon this point from Mr. King, and was gratified by his public announcement that nothing in the nature of a fusion would be permitted by a Liberal government.

The proposition made by a special committee of the Senate in 1925, looking to a merger of management with the control placed under a committee of fifteen,—five appointed by the Canadian Pacific, five by the government, and five by the ten thus appointed—meant to him monopoly under C. P. R. control. In a letter written at this time he said:

"I am determinedly opposed to this country being placed in the hands of a railway monopoly. If I had to have a monopoly I would rather have a company running it than the government. You can get some redress from a company; you can get none from a government. Once the thing got into definite shape we should have a huge monopoly, in which the officials would organize themselves into unions and simply dictate the policy of the country. The fact is that we have at the present time the best railway service in the world, without any exception whatever. The Canadian National is getting itself into a position when it will not only be self-supporting but will pay interest on a fair reasonable capitalization; thereafter within reasonable time it will probably pay back all the money that has been sunk in it. These two railways must be kept separate at



any cost whatever; in the meantime, until the Canadian National catches up, the country will have to pay the deficit."

His abrupt and unexpected intervention in the election campaign in 1925 in its closing days was due almost wholly to the fear that in the event of a change of government the Senate plan would get backing in high places. Upon this scheme he had some pointed comments to make:

"They propose to put the joint management of the road under a committee of fifteen. The Canadian Pacific railway will select five, the government will select five, the ten thus selected will select another five. Now if you know as much as I do about the way things are done at Ottawa you would know that when the dice are shaken the Canadian Pacific railway will have a majority of the fifteen, and you would practically have a railway monopoly—under the direction of the Canadian Pacific railway and its friends, who would promptly proceed to dismantle and loot the Canadian National railways in the interest of the Canadian Pacific railways. I wonder if you people have ever lived under a railway monopoly? I have. I lived in the province of Manitoba when there was only one railway there. I have seen a reputable merchant wait in a freight office for one hour before the freight agent would turn around to speak to him. I was there when the people very nearly broke out in rebellion on account of railway monopoly, and when they taxed themselves, and sacrificed everything they had to sacrifice, in order to secure competition; and for my part I want to say that I don't care whether the Canadian Pacific railway or government control it, to place the Dominion of Canada under a gigantic transportation monopoly, no matter by whom controlled or by whom managed, is a monumental crime, and I marvel that anyone outside of a lunatic asylum would make such a suggestion."

In the two great freight rate controversies which marked the decade of the 'twenties Sir Clifford was active in supporting reductions. In 1898, as we have seen, he was instrumental in making an arrangement with the Canadian Pacific by which, in return for a subsidy in aid of the construction

of the Crowsnest Railway, the C.P.R. agreed to minimum rates on wheat and flour going out of the West and certain articles of common consumption going into the prairie country.<sup>1</sup> With the general reductions of the next decade, freight rates dropped below the level fixed by this agreement; apparently it had been blotted out by the march of events. But conditions due to the war led to a series of horizontal increases in the freight rates; when the last of these increases was sought the Crowsnest Pass agreement barred the way. An act was at once rushed through Parliament suspending the Crowsnest Pass act for three years.<sup>2</sup> In 1922, failing further suspensory legislation the low rates again came into effect; and both railways massed all their influences at Ottawa to secure the removal of the inconvenient statute. There ensued a Homeric battle between the parliamentary representation from the West, which was almost solidly progressive, and the railways, in which the issue remained in doubt until almost the last hour. With the course of the *Free Press* in throwing itself with all its force into the fight on the side of the restoration of the rates, Sir Clifford was in complete sympathy; and in the long struggle which finally ended in 1925, in a compromise in which the lion's share of advantage went to the West, he was active and influential.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>See Chapter IV.

<sup>2</sup>The bill as introduced by the government provided for the indefinite suspension of the act. The three years limitation was added in the Senate at the instance of Robert Watson, Liberal senator from Manitoba, who acted in response to suggestions to this end from the government of Manitoba, of which T. C. Norris was the head. This alone made possible the restoration of the rates. The obligation of the West to Senator Watson and the Norris government, for a course which in the intervening years has saved it hundreds of millions of dollars in freight rates, has never been sufficiently understood.

<sup>3</sup>The grain and flour rates outward were restored in 1922 and the area to which they applied widened in 1925. The rates on westbound shipments were suspended in 1922 for another three years, and in 1925 they were abolished.



He seemed even more interested in the agitation to have the rates upon grain from Western Canada to Quebec and the Maritimes brought down to levels in keeping with the promises made to the people, and engagements entered into with the railway by the government when the National Transcontinental project was before parliament in 1903 and 1904. Sir Clifford had consented to this agreement with some reluctance; the provisions which had most to do with ensuring his acceptance were those by which the government and the railway mutually agreed that the freight rates on grain from Western Canada to Canadian ports would never be higher than the rates for the same grain to United States ports. This meant to him one of the things he had long desired, the keeping of Canadian grain in Canadian transportation channels to the seaboard would at last be achievable. In the election of 1904, when he obtained an almost solid delegation of Liberals from Western Canada, he dwelt strongly upon this aspect of the contract. When, after the completion of the road and its taking over by the government through the Grand Trunk's default, this transportation channel was barred to grain by the imposition of a charge of  $34\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. per 100 lbs., Sir Clifford had both public and private reasons for objecting to this breach of contract. He was an active party in the campaign which was begun in the *Manitoba Free Press* and carried on for some two years, demanding the application of the Crowsnest Pass rates to grain shipped to Quebec. He supplemented this by personal efforts at headquarters. There are letters from him early in the year 1926 testifying to his activities. He had been in touch with the authorities at Ottawa, and had heard from them the stock defence that if the Canadian National railway reduced its rates on grain to Quebec, the American railways, to retain their full proportion of the Canadian grain movement, would reduce

rates to a point which would throw the whole rate structure into the melting pot. On this point he wrote:

"I may say to you that this whole line of argument leaves me entirely cold. The wheat which is in question is only a small fraction of the Canadian crop which they carry over to Port Arthur and Fort William, and the idea that the United States railways are going to make war on us because we presume to carry our own wheat which is left over after the navigation season, is the most impudent and preposterous proposition that I ever heard of. I don't think that the Interstate Commerce Commission would for an instant allow the rate of the United States to be upset by any such proposition. And I am entirely in favour of going ahead and fighting it out with bare knuckles. We might just as well fight now as any other time. If we are to be told by the United States railways that we cannot carry our own wheat on our own railways to our own ports because they will start a rate war if we do, then we had better start the rate war now."

In another letter he said that he had been making a friendly call upon Sir Henry Thornton to give him his views. "I explained", he wrote, "what the reasons for building the Transcontinental were, and why it had been so extravagantly constructed, pointing out that the main reason for the standard of construction was to enable wheat to be carried cheaply. I pointed out to him that if he succeeded in carrying the 'carry-over' wheat to Canadian ports, he would be doing more for the unity of Canada than anything that had been done since the Canadian Pacific was built." He reported Sir Henry as friendly but naturally non-committal. "I told Thornton", Sir Clifford added, "that I was in the fight to stay; that I was not interested in any commercial scheme of my own with the object of making profits, and had considerable leisure to devote to what I considered the most important thing that can be done for the benefit of Canada at the present time." Sir Clifford



had just come out of an election campaign in which he had taken the stump for the King government, and at this time, January, 1926, the fate of the government was in the balance owing to the party division in the Commons; but so deeply did he feel on this question that he wrote that if the government took what he regarded as an un-Canadian policy it would be the parting of the ways so far as he was concerned.

When in August, 1927, as the result chiefly of a case presented to it by the Quebec Board of Trade, the Board of Railway Commissioners included in its general finding on the freight rates an instruction to the Canadian National to reduce the rate on grain from  $34\frac{1}{2}$  cents per cwt. to 18.34 cents, Sir Clifford was naturally highly pleased. He sent a jubilant telegram to the *Manitoba Free Press* suggesting that this was an occasion for the office rooster—a facetious reference to the old-time newspaper custom in vogue in his younger days, of ornamenting the front pages of newspapers, on the morrow of a glorious political victory, with pictures of crowing cocks. But the victory was more apparent than real. On the grain rate from Georgian Bay ports to the Maritime ports, grain is carried from Quebec to St. John and Halifax at the nominal rate of one cent. a bushel, and it had been too lightly assumed that this rate would apply as well to grain shipments to these ports from the West via Quebec. This not being stipulated in the Board's judgment, the railways clapped on to the rate east of Quebec most of the deduction it was ordered to make west of Quebec, thus effectively plugging the way to the sea, except for a brief period in the late fall when the port of Quebec is open. This obstruction has since been challenged before the Railway Commission by the Halifax Board of Trade, but it is still in place, July, 1931.

## V

Freight rates by sea in these years were almost as contentious a topic as freight rates on land. In the early months of 1923 there were going on at the same moment an investigation into freight rates on the Great Lakes by a Royal Commission, and an enquiry by a special committee of the House of Commons into the operations of the North Atlantic Shipping Conference. The findings of the two bodies appeared about the same time; and they both told the same story: there were combinations on the Great Lakes and on the ocean which took advantage of the situation to put up rates on farm products. It looked as though, with low grain rates secured to the farmers by the restoration of the Crowsnest Pass rates, the shipping interests had decided to dip into the extra funds thus obtained for them by increasing freight rates on the Great Lakes and also on the Atlantic.

The investigation into the lake freights was the direct result of a newspaper campaign begun in September, 1922, by the *Manitoba Free Press*, and carried on for months. It was charged in these articles that the carrying of grain between Canadian ports was a monopoly; that the Canadian boats in this monopoly charged nearly twice as much to carry wheat to Port Colborne as they did for wheat carried to Buffalo, the near-by United States port; that there was discrimination as between Canadian ports and Canadian shippers. These charges were substantiated by evidence adduced before the Commission and confirmed by its finding.

The investigations of the parliamentary committee showed that once cattle began to move in consequence of the raising of the embargo against Canadian cattle by Great Britain, the rate of \$15 per head fixed at first was raised to \$20, to \$22.50, and in the case of some ports to \$25 a head. The further extraordinary fact was revealed that



the members of the North Atlantic Shipping Conference, which included the Canadian Government Marine, carried United States flour for 4 cents per hundred lb. cheaper than the rate upon Canadian flour. The committee found that a combine existed among the shipping companies, and that by its excessive charges it in large measure nullified the advantages in cheap transportation provided for the Canadian farmers by expenditures upon canals and railways.

Sir Clifford Sifton took so lively an interest in the campaign of publicity carried on by the *Free Press* in relation to these matters, that for the first and last time in the history of his connection with the newspaper he joined the writing staff and took a direct part in the discussion. There appeared in the *Free Press* in April and May, 1923, a series of front page articles in large type dealing with the performance of the two shipping combines, and driving home the argument that these exactions were ruinous not only to the western farmers but to business in the cities. The articles appeared under the heading: "The Gentle Process of Beating the Farmer and Destroying Winnipeg Trade." The idea was Sir Clifford's; the heading was his; and he wrote all the articles appearing in the first series, and some of the subsequent ones. Sir Clifford showed himself the master of a trenchant journalistic style. His method was to employ question and answer; and how effectively he made his points is illustrated by quotation. No. 3 in the series deals with the combination on the Great Lakes:

"There is a combination to keep up freight rates on the Lakes against western wheat.

"Has the fact of such a combination been proved?

"It has.

"Were the rates kept up?

"They were and are.

"Did the farmers suffer from it last fall?

"They did to the extent of suffering a very large loss.

"How did it come about?

"It looks as if the shipping brokers, when they saw that the rail rates were reduced, decided to take out of the farmers all that the latter had saved by the reduction of railway rates.

"Did they do it?

"Just about.

"Grain is beginning to move now, is it not?

"Yes, the spring shipments are beginning and as soon as navigation opens, lake shipments will start.

"Are they going to put up the same job on the farmers this spring as they did last fall?

"They will if they are not stopped.

"So that after the great fight that the farmers made in parliament last year to get freight rates down, these steamship fellows are going to gobble up the saving themselves?

"That is about it.

"It will have to be stopped?

"You have guessed it.

The participation by the government-owned ships in the North Atlantic Conference was made vivid to the public in these terms:

"The Canadian Mercantile Marine is in the Atlantic Conference, and has been fighting to keep Atlantic Rates up instead of to reduce them.

"Explain this business, 'the Atlantic Conference'.

"Well, it is very simple. The shipping companies in the North Atlantic business are in a combine called the 'North Atlantic Conference'. There is no competition. Their managers meet every little while and fix the rates. Their idea is to figure out how high a rate traffic will stand, and charge that.

"Then they are practically a combination to get as much out of us as they can?

"Exactly.

"When we spent \$70,000,000 for a Canadian mercantile Marine we thought we were doing it to get better rates for ourselves.

"No doubt. But the fact is that your \$70,000,000 mercantile marine promptly went into the combination.



"But we spent this money to fight the combination and get lower rates?

"Just so, but your \$70,000,000 dog won't fight."

Both these combinations to control rates suffered by reason of these exposures made of their methods. The Lake combine was destroyed by legislation reinforced by public opinion. The North Atlantic Shipping Conference thought better of its discrimination against Canadian flour; while the question of the cattle rates fell into abeyance when rising prices in the United States gave the Canadian cattle-raiser a better market nearer home.

## VI

Banking was one of the subjects about which Sir Clifford had something to say. He did not fall in with the view, so widely held, that our system is the last word in banking wisdom, and that criticism of it reveals a mind inclined to subversive policies. His views were far from radical; but the mere fact that a man of his standing in the world of affairs should declare publicly upon occasion that the banking system was in need of overhauling, attracted wide public attention. He held and expressed decided opinions upon several points. There should be government inspection of the chartered banks. This reform, long resisted by the banks and by succeeding Ministers of Finance, was conceded in 1924. Merging of banks, except under the most exceptional of circumstances, should not be permitted. The ordinary procedure should be that a bank that could not stand the pace should go into voluntary liquidation. He viewed with alarm the process by which the control of credit was being placed year after year in fewer and fewer

hands.<sup>1</sup> With perhaps one exception he regarded all the successive mergers, which marked the decade of 1919-1929, as not in the public interest but as manifestations of a determination by a limited group of men to establish and exercise wide banking and credit control. To no merger was he more strongly opposed than to that of the Bank of Commerce and the Standard Bank in 1928. He was closely associated with the campaign which the *Manitoba Free Press* carried on in an attempt to prevent the consummation of this merger. For this merger, as for most of the others which preceded it, Sir Clifford could see no public necessity; it was, as he saw it, a development of private banking policy divorced from regard for the public interest. He thought the government should refuse consent; and to this end fruitlessly laboured in conjunction with the *Free Press*.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>"We are rapidly approaching that condition in which two, or at most three, banks will be doing the whole of the business of the Dominion, and you will have the spectacle of about three men sitting on the whole of the funds of the people of Canada, deposited in the banks, and deciding to whom they will loan these funds. Now we know what human nature is. We know that if there are three men in that position they will be in telephonic communication with each other, and they will have an understanding as to what they are going to do, and the result of it will be that any man who wishes to go into business in a large way, and wants banking accommodation, will be absolutely and entirely helpless to get such accommodation if in any way he has displeased the three or four gentlemen who happen to be in control of the funds. I do not know how you feel about it, but I think that such a condition of affairs is absolutely and entirely intolerable, and if anything would justify an armed rebellion against the established condition of affairs, I think such a consummation of our banking system is the one thing that would justify it."—Sir Clifford Sifton at Aurora, October, 1925.

<sup>2</sup>"In this race (for enlargement by the big banks) no small bank is safe any longer. If it is prosperous and rendering good service to the public it is in greater danger of disappearance than a weak and struggling bank would be. As things are going we are heading straight for a condition where we shall have only five or six banks in the whole of Canada. It is useless to expect the banks to do anything to check this tendency. The smaller banks are willing to be absorbed, if there is anything in it for them and the big banks are willing to absorb them. The only protection for the public is the Dominion government, whose consent to an amalgamation is necessary. This protection to date has been worthless."—*Manitoba Free Press*, July 16, 1928.



Sir Clifford's most detailed public discussion of the banking system was embodied in a public address which he delivered in Cobourg in January, 1924. There is among his papers an enlarged and amended version of this address bearing date February, 1925; this with other addresses was prepared for a projected western speaking trip which never came off, owing to a family bereavement. In this memorandum he elaborated his idea of a Central Board, which would be the head of the Canadian Banking system. It should be made up of three—possibly five—men experienced and successful in banking and finance. "We are not destitute of such men in Canada. We have men who would regard appointment to such a board as a fine culmination of an honourable and successful career, and would honour themselves and their country by performing the high functions of the office with integrity and ability." To this Board would be entrusted the duty of public bank inspection, and the still greater responsibility of exercising a public control over credit. Sir Clifford outlined the powers and functions of this board:

"My suggestion is that the Central Board should act as a Bank of re-discount, their notes being Dominion notes, issued by the Finance Department on their requisition. It should be recognized in the legislation that it is the privilege and the duty of the Banks to go to the Central Board for re-discount whenever the business of the country requires it. In other words, it should be indicated to the Banks that they are expected not to pursue a panic policy because they fear a lack of currency, but to rely on the means which Parliament will provide for their relief. With this machinery in force it would be impossible for a solvent bank to fail, and the fear that hangs over small banks like a nightmare in time of stress would be entirely removed.

"It should further be the duty of this Central Board to study constantly and systematically the distribution of credit throughout the whole country, to warn the Banks when credit became too easy and was approaching a condition of inflation. Similarly, to warn them if contraction

appeared to be taking place too rapidly. The result would be that we would have a uniform systematic policy, where co-operation between the Banks would very shortly result in a condition of affairs where we should no longer have excessive inflation or excessive deflation.

"It should further be the duty of the Central Board to survey the whole field with the object of seeing that all necessary facilities were granted, and if any class of the community claimed that there was any lack of legitimate credit facilities, they could go to the Central Board and have the matter discussed by competent men, who would see their requests with a sympathetic desire to meet the circumstances of the case. The discussion of these things before parliamentary committees and meetings of the House of Commons, are very likely to be futile and unsatisfactory, but such a Board as I have described would at once be able to make a complete and thorough examination of every case in which a section of the country was making complaints. They would ascertain whether the complaints were well founded or not, and if they were well founded they would recommend to the Government the proper and most effective means of supplying the lack, and this would be done by men whose business was finance, and who could be relied on not to recommend any unsound system."

Sir Clifford was an ardent believer in the small neighbourhood bank; and could see no reason why there should not be a place for these banks in our banking system. "With respect to the question of small banks", he said, in a memorandum which he prepared in March, 1925, for the information of a group of members of parliament:

"I am entirely in favour of the freer incorporation of banks with a capital of say two hundred thousand or two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, but I believe it should be done under a special line of legislation, providing for systematic inspection and for a privilege of re-discount with the Finance Department whenever such a bank was pressed for ready money. I do not think the small banks should have the right to issue currency. I have no doubt that a plan for such banks on more or less the same principle as the American National banks could be readily worked out. I think it would give a little more elasticity to the position,



and destroy the feeling that there is a money monopoly and that when anybody wishes to get a charter for a bank he has to fight the entrenched Bankers' Monopoly at Ottawa."

Sir Clifford thought that if in the western cities there were individual banks financed by local capital and directed by men whose interests were closely identified with the city's prosperity, encouragement would be given to local industry and to agricultural development in the tributary district that would not be forthcoming were banking credit wholly at the disposal of branches of national banks. He did not advocate these banks in the hope that credit would be cheaper and more elastic. He was, in fact, unsympathetic to the view that the West had been starved for credit; he thought that in many respects the West had had more credit than was good for it.<sup>1</sup> The virtue of these small banks would be that local credit would be more intelligently applied and more consistently maintained, where it was controlled by directors with local knowledge and interests. He could see no difficulty whatever in the establishment of these banks, provided re-discounting facilities were available to them at Ottawa.

Sir Clifford Sifton's heretical views upon banking and credit—as they were regarded by many of the financial pillars of the country—did not indicate any weakening of his faith in the capitalistic structure of society, in which he saw the greatest assurance of benefit to all classes of society. He put this point of view clearly in a public address:

"The capitalistic system has grown up and it is in use because, and only because, the experience of mankind has proven it to be the best way of doing what has to be done.

<sup>1</sup>From a letter by Sir Clifford Sifton, Dec. 14, 1922: "The trouble in the west is not that there is not enough money loaned. It is that the banks should be to some extent local, and sympathetic to and conversant with local conditions. It cannot be cured in a year, but we can call a halt and start in the right direction."

Parts of it will be superseded by modern changes and improvements, and the system will be improved from time to time, but as a whole the system cannot be superseded. To say that some one man can devise a system to take the place of the so-called Capitalistic System is to say that one man—generally, by the way, a man who has never done any business at all,—can invent a method of transacting the vast multitude of business dealings in the world, which is better than hundreds of thousands of men, actually doing the business over a period of centuries, have been able to devise. What we want, what we must constantly devote our attention to, is the correction of the admitted evils of the system which we have. The commerce of the world is a huge affair. Millions of men are engaged in carrying it on. Its powerful currents at times bear hardly on the weak and the unfortunate. It is the supreme task of our modern legislators to remedy these evils, to protect the weak against those whose capacity, good fortune or circumstances, render too strong. In short, to prevent undue aggregation by the strong at the expense of the weak.”

## VII

In the closing days of the Dominion election campaign of 1925 Sir Clifford intervened vigorously on behalf of the Liberals with a speech at Aurora, which he subsequently repeated at Port Hope and elsewhere. He prepared his remarks by saying that he thought he was in a position to give “a disinterested and detached opinion.” He no longer had business interests that could be affected by government policies. “For nearly forty years my principal attention has been directed to public affairs. While I have from time to time engaged in business enterprises, they have been of a more or less secondary character, and my principal study and principal interest has been in the conduct of the affairs of the country.” His views on the tariff, as set forth on this occasion, may be taken as his conclusion after thirty years of wrestling with this question. His judgment was that the tariff, pretty much as it stood, met the needs of the country; practicable and desirable changes could be



made only within a narrow range. "Business and prices have been built up on the strength of the existing tariff, and if you lower it everyone is in trouble. On the other hand, any fool can raise the tariff, because when a proposal is made to do this, no particular person feels that he is especially affected, and the result is that at the time, if specious explanations are given, there is probably no protest made in the same way as occurs when an attempt is made to reduce."

To the Conservative proposition for a general increase in the tariff he expressed vigorous opposition. Such a policy would be anti-national and reactionary. It would mean an increase in living costs. It would increase sectional unrest and dissatisfaction. "It is true a few manufacturers will make larger profits; they will be able to have three automobiles instead of two, a larger number of servants and more luxuries than they have at the present time, and the number of idle rich will be increased; but it passes the wit of man to explain how that is going to benefit the ordinary ratepayer of Canada."

It was not, however, to warn the country against the dangers of high tariff that Sir Clifford broke silence. Instead, it was for the purpose of warning the public that he saw in the political developments in Montreal signs of a definite attempt, by moneyed interests, to put themselves in a position where they could control the government of Canada. The official Conservative party, under the leadership of Mr. Meighen, was hardly in evidence in the Montreal district in this campaign. Instead a new political group, headed by Mr. Patenaude, a member for a time of the Borden government, took the field with programmes presumably more attractive to the electors. This new party was notoriously the creation of a group of wealthy men in Montreal. "The scheme is", said Sir Clifford, "by hook or by crook to get enough Patenaude candidates elected in

Quebec, which, joined with Mr. Meighen's following in the rest of Canada, will give a majority. Then the position will be that Mr. Meighen, if he wishes to retain power, will have to do what Mr. Patenaude says, and Mr. Patenaude will have to do what the men say who financed him and put him where he is. It is variously estimated that these capitalists have contributed from one to two million dollars. It is not likely to be any less."

Some of the purposes of this combination were indicated by Sir Clifford. By controlling the government and its policies they would get the money invested in the campaign returned with a handsome profit. They would raise the tariff "and take tens of millions out of you and me in the increased cost of goods." They would carry out the scheme of railway consolidation outlined in the Senate enquiry. "They can guarantee the dividends on the Canadian Pacific railway and reap huge profits by speculating in its stock; and, lastly, they will have handed over to them, to their tender mercies, the whole of the Canadian National system, to be looted as they see fit." There would be transportation monopoly by sea, lake and land; the process of amalgamating the banks, thus getting the control of credit into fewer hands, would continue without check. "I declare the fight in this election is not primarily about the tariff. The issue is monopoly or no monopoly: monopoly of the money power, monopoly of transportation on land, monopoly of transportation on sea, control of the government by half a dozen plutocrats in Montreal instead of by the people."

Sir Clifford's opinion as expressed in this speech, as to the best means of meeting the situation, was a closer working alliance between the Liberals and Progressives. The advice came too late, for the campaign was already in its final stages; but when the election resulted in deadlock, largely as the result of seats lost by clashes between the



Liberals and the Progressives, he again urged, by direct and indirect means, that the Progressives and Liberals should come together, determine to what extent they occupied common ground, and upon the basis of this agreement create a coalition government. He worked industriously to this end for some time; but fruitlessly. When, instead of a frank understanding and a joint sharing of responsibility, a makeshift arrangement was reached that the government should continue in office as a minority government, subject to its success in securing the support of the Progressives, Sir Clifford, with his knowledge of political human nature, predicted the shipwreck which arrived in due season. He took no part in the 1926 election, being absent in England during most of the campaign, but upon the constitutional issue raised by the course followed by Lord Byng, the Governor-General, he was in hearty sympathy with the Liberals, and he rejoiced in their victory.

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

### HIGH POLICIES AND THE PUBLIC INTEREST

"I am aware that the age is not what we all wish, but I am sure that the only means to check its degeneracy is heartily to concur in whatever is best in our time."—*Burke*.

SIR CLIFFORD SIFTON, as has been seen, said in the general elections of 1925 that he was so removed from business activities which had any possible relation to government policies, that he deemed himself in an exceptionally favourable position to give a detached and disinterested opinion upon the questions of the day. But events were already shaping that were to bring him back, if only for a moment, into the world of great affairs; and since his re-emergence was made the occasion for a renewal of attacks upon him, in which there was a revival of the old spirit of venomous misrepresentation, space must here be taken to give in outline the story of his brief abortive association with the Georgian Bay canal enterprise.

The Montreal, Ottawa and Georgian Bay Canal Company was chartered in 1894 by the Dominion parliament to build a ship canal from Montreal to Georgian Bay, by way of the Ottawa, Mattawa and French rivers. The "father" of the project was McLeod Stewart, a once-prominent resident of the capital, and associated with him were a number of Canadians prominent in the area to be served by the canal. The possibilities of this enterprise, which planned to carry a seaway to the Great Lakes, appealed so strongly to British capital, interested in engineering projects, that



the control and direction of the company was taken over by a British syndicate, the most prominent member of which was Sir Robert W. Perks.<sup>1</sup> The English shareholders went ahead making surveys and preparing plans, in the expectation that the government of Sir Wilfrid Laurier would make the construction of the canal possible by approval of the plans, and by the granting of necessary subsidies. In the words of one of the largest English shareholders, making bitter complaint of their treatment to the writer, the Laurier government had neither the resolution to tell them that no help would be forthcoming nor the courage to co-operate with them in the enterprise; but it permitted them to go on until they had sunk two and a half million dollars in the scheme.

Upon the change of government in 1911 a commission was appointed to look into the practicability of the project; it reported adversely, whereupon the Borden government plunged for the alternative St. Lawrence route by committing the country to the vast expenditure necessary to deepen the Welland Canal to a depth of twenty-seven feet. As time revealed, this choice was fatal to the Georgian Bay Canal project; but the company, in the hope of better days, kept the charter alive by having it triennially renewed. In the ten renewals under six successive governments no objection to the charter was ever voiced in parliament.

Winfield B. Sifton, the second son of Sir Clifford, while living in London had business contacts with some of the British shareholders, and they sought to interest him in the enterprise. He was a young man with a mind and imagina-

<sup>1</sup>Sir Robert Perks (born 1849) has, in the course of a long and active life, had a succession of distinguished careers; as a lawyer; as a Liberal member of parliament high in the councils of his party and close to Mr. Gladstone; as the outstanding lay-leader of the Wesleyan denomination; and as still the directing mind of one of the world's great engineering corporations.

tion equal to the mastery of large enterprises; and in studying the proposition, which upon the lines originally projected was undoubtedly obsolete, he saw the possibility that an arrangement might be made by which the major cost of the canal could be met by the development of hydro-electric power incidental to its construction, leaving a comparatively small but still substantial portion of the cost to be raised by the shareholders. A partnership arrangement was entered into between Mr. Sifton and the English syndicate. He returned to Canada; re-organized the company, which had always remained nominally Canadian in its directorate; amended and modernized his plans; and in 1926 submitted them to the government for their approval.

Among those whom Mr. Winfield Sifton sought to interest was his father. The project had all the elements, to Sir Clifford, of a great adventure. It appealed to his imagination; it gave a new field for the exercise of his powers of planning on a large scale, and giving effect to these plans; and, most-determining factor of all, it gave the opportunity for making a great constructive contribution to Canada's national system of transportation. Of all the unworthy insinuations of which Sir Clifford Sifton, in his long life, was the victim, that which could see in his association with the Georgian Bay Canal project nothing but a desire to make money was the meanest. Instead, at a time of life when he had no further need of money and when his money-making ambitions were over, he put his whole fortune (which was substantial, though only a mere fraction of the sum associated with his name in the popular mind) in jeopardy by embarking upon a highly speculative transportation enterprise. It was a desire to serve the cause of national development, to which he had given his years of maximum labour, in his own way, that sent him, like



Ulysses, upon adventures strange and new, in his old age. He became actively interested in the Georgian Bay enterprise, taking over the major portion of his sons' interests; and when, in the parliamentary session of 1927, the whole matter came before parliament upon an application to renew the charter, he accepted responsibility for the project in its new aspects. He was, however, unable to take any part in the discussion, owing to his absence in the southern states through illness; and the advocacy of the scheme devolved upon his sons Winfield B. Sifton and Harry A. Sifton, who appeared and made their argument before the Committee of Railways and Canals.

The details of the proposition, as it took final form in the bill as presented to parliament, and in modifications submitted to the Committee by its promoters, are here outlined, in their strength and weakness, for the judgment of public opinion now and hereafter. The canal, twenty-four feet in depth, was to be built within ten years, at an estimated cost of two hundred and eighty-two million dollars; this cost would be met by hydro-electric development, plus an estimated contribution by the owners of thirty-two millions, which would be taken care of by tolls. Tolls and rates for electric power were to be subject to *public control by Dominion authorities*. There was to be no export of power; the directors of the Company were to be British subjects. No money was to be paid to shareholders from the sale of hydro-electric power until the canal was completed and in operation—despite which engagement the projected scheme was widely assailed as a sinister attempt to capture water-power sites, while dodging the obligation to build a canal. The Dominion Government had the power to take over the work, during construction or after completion, upon seven days' notice. And finally the promoters made it abundantly clear that they only desired to proceed

with the work in the absence of an intention on the part of the government to build the canal itself.

The argument of public advantage in building the canal was clear and cogent. It would give a sea-way by interior lines, free of all possible international complications, to the Great Lakes, at no cost to the public treasury. It would shorten the water route from Port Arthur to Montreal by two hundred and eighty-eight miles, enabling the average time for cargo vessels to be cut from six days, six hours to four days, seventeen hours. Wheat could be carried at 3.73c. per bushel, as against a variable rate running from six to eight and a half cents. The canal would vastly stimulate inter-Canada trade. It would put the mining regions of North Ontario virtually on the sea. The promoters saw wheat and ore going out, and Maritime coal going in as far west as Port Arthur. By keeping trade flowing east and west in an all-Canadian route, protected against the "cut-offs" to United States channels of the alternative route, the settled transportation policy of Canada would be served.

The opposition to the enterprise was of the most variegated kind, but in the totality of its power it was overwhelming. The power interests of Quebec—which claimed the right to develop Carillon rapids, the most considerable water-power in the Ottawa river—were the directing minds of the opposition, but were successful in camouflaging, some-

"There has been a suggestion that there is here an issue between public and private interest. I submit that no such issue exists. The canal company and the promoters do not suggest that it would be better to do this work through the agency of the canal company, than to do the same work by the federal parliament of Canada. I wish to state that the company fully approves of the principle of public ownership as applied to the works, both for the purpose of navigation and incidental water power development upon the Ottawa river. We would be pleased to have parliament take over this enterprise to-day, as it stands. We would not only make no objection but we would facilitate the procedure in every way."—Harry A. Sifton before the Committee on Railways and Canals, *Toronto Star*, April 5th, 1927.



what successfully, their activities. The provinces of Ontario and Quebec, with their eyes on the future development of the St. Lawrence, seized the opportunity to formulate and advance the new and extreme claim that the Dominion had no control whatever over water-power in a navigable stream; even water-power developed incidentally to navigation works must, they asserted, be turned over absolutely free of cost to the provinces. The cry of provincial rights was raised both in Ontario and Quebec; it was taken up and seconded in Parliament by both the official opposition, and by the "farmer" group which in the interests of a temporary success and without a thought to the larger issues of the future, rejected the claim, heretofore maintained by all parties, of a beneficial Dominion right in the water-powers of navigable streams. Then there were the doctrinaires to whom private development of power, even under the most stringent provisions of public control, was anathema; and the demagogues, who found a fine emotional release in being able to dramatize themselves as the stern unbending defenders of public rights against the machinations of sinister exploiting conspiracies.

The combination was irresistible; the parliamentary steam-roller went over the proposition; and the Georgian Bay canal enterprise ceased to exist. In all the torrent of criticism and denunciation the one argument that would have justified the rejection of the charter was not included, namely, that the day of private ownership of canals had gone by and that this enterprise, of great national advantage, should be accepted by the government as something to be proceeded with at the earliest possible moment.<sup>1</sup>

Sir Clifford Sifton, in his correspondence with the writer at this time, shows no feeling of disappointment at the rejection of the charter; he undoubtedly realized that there

<sup>1</sup>It was indeed left to Harry Sifton himself to suggest this argument to the committee.

was an arguable case against its renewal, on public grounds. But he did resent the patent and wilful misrepresentation of his motives, and the purposes of the enterprise which had formed the chief stock-in-trade of the opponents of the measure. "I do not personally care about the fate of the bill," he wrote, "but I very decidedly object to the methods employed to kill it." Later he wrote that he had been put in a false position regarding the Georgian Bay canal matter; and expressed his regret that he had not been able, owing to his physical condition, to be present at Ottawa to deal personally with the accusations made against him. While the discussion was going on in parliament he sent a telegram in these terms to be read in the House: "I am not benefitting, and never have received any benefit, by any concession or favour from any government in Canada. I do not desire that the vote on the Georgian Bay canal charter should be influenced by anything except its merits as an enterprise for the benefit of Canada." He did not know until after the issue was decided that the Minister of the Crown, to whom the message was addressed, had not made its contents known to parliament. His observations on this failure to meet his request were somewhat pungent.

## II

The general public was inclined to regard the Georgian Bay canal and the St. Lawrence Seaway as mutually exclusive projects; but to Sir Clifford Sifton they were complementary to one another. While he was promoting the cause of the route by the Ottawa he was also serving as a member of the National Advisory Council, set up by the Dominion government on May 7, 1924, for the purpose of tendering advice to the government as to the best way to provide increased facilities of navigation between the Great Lakes and the sea, by way of the St. Lawrence. He was appointed to this position because it was known that the



progressive improvement of the St. Lawrence as a channel of commerce had been a matter of interest to him, dating back to the time when, as a member of the Crown, he had been active in promoting the policy by which the St. Lawrence canals were given a uniform depth of fourteen feet.

As we have already seen, Laurier's idea in 1896 was that the St. Lawrence should be deepened by joint action by the two countries, and when this suggestion was renewed as the result of a visit to Washington in October 1918, by Mr. Arthur Sifton and Mr. Arthur Meighen, members of the Canadian government, it met with Sir Clifford Sifton's approval. In every reference to the development of the St. Lawrence Seaway which is found in his correspondence or in his utterances for the next six or seven years, he regards it as a matter of course that the two countries will act together, and that the Canadian interests will be represented by the Dominion government. The idea that the provinces of Ontario or Quebec could have anything to do with it as principals was entirely absent from his mind. The first definite reference to it is found in a letter of February 25, 1922. Caution in proceeding with it will be necessary, he says, because of the financial position of the country, and also because political opposition from Quebec was threatened. "The international features", he wrote, "are pretty complex, but in my judgment the more we get working with the United States by joint commissions, the better for us. It builds up a body of precedents which may be of great use to Canada in times of stress in holding the United States steady."

Two years later he thinks the government should be making some progress in the matter. He detects blocking tactics, due, as he thinks, to political pressure from Quebec. He has, he writes, been giving a member of the Dominion government his views on the matter. "I said that they would have to drop the policy of blocking the St. Lawrence

Waterways, make a bargain with the United States' government, and go ahead with the work at once, deepening the channel to the depth of the New Welland canal and developing the power at the same time." It was dangerous for Quebec to try to prevent the improvement of the international waterways, while as for the people of Montreal, if they knew what they were about they would be pressing the government to hurry on with the work. "I think", he added prophetically, "there will be a tremendous row over this before it is through."

In February 1925 he drafted a memorandum embodying his views about the proposed development—apparently for private use. In it he suggested that the whole project be carried out as a single work, by a joint international commission, with money raised by a bond issue guaranteed as to principal and interest by both governments. This plan provided for power development only on the international section—elsewhere only navigation works would be built. He estimated that from the sale of power developed on the international section, half in Canada, half in the United States, at a rate not higher than the cost of the Chippewa power produced by the Ontario Hydro, a yearly income would be obtained large enough to meet the annual interest on the bonds, and in time to retire them; thus constructing the whole waterway at no cost to the country. The memorandum sets out in the most telling manner the advantages to both countries that would result from the building of the Canal. There is still no doubt in his mind of the right of the Dominion to use the power to pay for the canal. Nor at this time was there a doubt, upon this point, in the mind of any one else.

The tragedy of the controversy in parliament over the Georgian Bay canal matter was that it brought such a volume of support—due almost entirely to temporary political conditions—to the contention of the provinces that



water-power in navigable streams was indefeasibly theirs, that this claim, from being a mere shadow cast upon the Dominion title, became a factor of increasing importance, until it virtually controlled the situation. In August 1927 Sir Clifford is still of the opinion that the only basis upon which the canal can be built is that "the power shall pay for the canal completely and entirely." But he adds: "I think Ontario and Quebec, through their governments, will fight to get the power free of canal costs." In the interval between the drafting of the memorandum and the writing of this letter the Georgian Bay battle had been fought.

The effect of the outcome of the Georgian Bay application was also marked upon the finding by the National Advisory Council in January 1928 to which, of course, Sir Clifford was a party. Here there is no definite recommendation that the Dominion go ahead and build the seaway, making the power pay for the canals; but a recognition that on the Canadian section of the waterway, situated within the province of Quebec, the canals would have to be obtained as an incidental by-product of power development by privately chartered companies. This was something more than a concession to Quebec's supposed hostility to public ownership; it could be interpreted—and was so interpreted—as a recognition by implication that the chartering of these private water power companies which were to build and donate canals to the Dominion, rested with the province. At the next session of the Quebec legislature the Beauharnois Light, Heat and Power Company was given a charter-right to develop water-power from a flow of 40,000 cubic feet per second diverted from the St. Lawrence, which was the beginning of the Beauharnois exploitation. Sir Clifford did not, however, accept the chartering of the Beauharnois company and its application to the Dominion government for power to divert water, as a fulfilment of the recommendations of the Advisory committee. He saw at



MAJOR VICTOR SIFTON, D.S.O.

SIR CLIFFORD SIFTON

MAJOR CLIFFORD SIFTON, D.S.O.

1923. Sir Clifford leading his own team of three Irish hunters, and supported by two of his sons, won the Blue Ribbon Event at the Royal Winter Fair. Major Victor and Major Clifford rode with their father





once that a partial power and canal development midway in the seaway would, in its practical effect, operate to put obstacles in the way of the completion of the untouched sections. His view was that no partial developments should be agreed to by the Dominion until definite plans for the construction of the whole seaway were completed. He made his views known, by letter and by other means, to individual members of the Dominion cabinet. In one such letter, written early in March, 1929, he said that if canals through the Canadian section could be provided in keeping with the recommendation of the Advisory committee, he was sure that the United States would complete the channel to the necessary depth from the Quebec boundary to Lake Superior, turning over to Canada her share of the developed power. He was prepared to waive the question of ownership of water-power if the canal throughout the whole Canadian section were built incidental to power development. "Quebec", he wrote to a Dominion minister early in March 1929, "can go ahead and grant what charters it likes, provided it gives the Dominion the canals and makes provision for their maintenance." If this was not agreed to the Dominion, in Sir Clifford's view, should decline to co-operate. "No canal; no power." This was Sir Clifford's final word of advice on the matter of the St. Lawrence waterways; how sound were his views events were promptly to demonstrate.

### III

It is not to be inferred from Sir Clifford's advocacy of the over-riding right of the Dominion in the matter of water-power, that he subscribed to what might be called the Federalist view of the division of authority between the Dominion and the provinces. He was the political product of an age when the Liberal provinces of Ontario and Manitoba resisted what they regarded as attempted encroachments by the Federal power; and he remained throughout



life friendly to that conception of our federation which gives the maximum of power to the provinces. The writer once sought his sympathetic support to the view that progressive findings by the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council were destroying the balance of powers between the Dominion and provincial authorities, as designed by the framers of Confederation, and creating a condition in which the Central power would not be equal to the duties imposed upon it by the constitution. The occasion for the discussion was the judgment of the Privy Council, which declared the essential provisions of the Industrial Disputes Act beyond the powers of the Dominion parliament. Sir Clifford was asked for his opinion as to the soundness of the view that "this judgment pushes to an extreme the view that Canada is a federation of sovereignties tied together by tenuous bonds, the central power having very nominal powers, or none at all, over many matters of national concern." Sir Clifford, however, refused to be alarmed. In his reply he said:

"I do not think that there is anything whatever to be disturbed about. The judgment of the Privy Council is undoubtedly right and sound in law. As a matter of fact, when this Bill was going through the House, I got up out of my seat and went over and sat beside Sir Wilfrid, and told him that the Act was unconstitutional and that if it ever got before the Court it would be so declared. I consider the judgment of the Privy Council absolutely and entirely right, and Judge Hodgins, who dissented from the other judgment in the Appellate Court of Ontario, was also undoubtedly right. This principle of invoking imaginary national emergencies to violate the constitution is a most indefensible principle. There is such a thing as a National emergency in time of war or something of that kind, but the idea of saying that any such legislation as this is based on emergency is sheer nonsense. The Dominion Parliament may as well legislate about the Winnipeg milk supply, and say that it was a national emergency. There isn't a bit of trouble about our constitution. All it requires is to be

observed. In this case, not only is the law clear that dealing with strikes and labour disputes is within the jurisdiction of the Province, but undoubtedly it is wise that it should be so, and I have no sympathy with any idea of trying to bring about a change in that respect. We want some changes in our constitution, but that is not one of them. The fact is that our Provinces are distinct entities, in which the Provincial Government and the Provincial Legislature is a much better judge of labour conditions and how they should be adjusted and disposed of than the Dominion authorities can possibly be.

"No, I don't think you need be a bit disturbed about the central parliament not having enough authority to enable Canada to function as a nation. As a matter of fact, if any aggression on Provincial rights starts, we will just have another agitation such as we had years ago. I may tell you that I advised King very strongly against attempting any constitutional changes without bringing in the provinces. He would lay himself open to a fatal attack, and would in all probability fail."

#### IV

In the hectic decade following the war, which just covered the remaining span of his life, Sir Clifford found himself somewhat in the position of the old Roman lamenting the decadence of the commonwealth. The jazz age, in its tempo and its spirit, was centuries away from the days of his youth—a period when clean living, hard work, the treasuring of high ambitions with the fitting of one's self to the efficient achievement of these ambitions, were the approved virtues of the young. The unquenchable appetite for pleasure and thrills; the impatience of authority; the repugnance to hard work; the indifference to the experience of age; the contempt for the old standards of habits and duties—these manifestations of post-war reaction to the strain of the war filled him with deep concern for the rising generation, and for the country's future.

In 1927, Queen's University conferred upon him the honorary degree of LL.D.; and in the address which he



delivered to the students on that occasion he gave expression to some of his thoughts:

"The few minutes which I have to occupy, I intend to utilize in speaking to young men for the purpose of emphasizing the old-fashioned and homely virtues. Not many among you perhaps will lead a life as strenuous as I have led, but I want to say that in every field in which I have employed my energy, my reward has been proportioned to the amount of hard work I have put into it. I have never acquired anything worth while without working hard to obtain it.

"Let us stop preaching the doctrine of idleness. I worked fourteen hours and sometimes sixteen hours a day during the greater portion of my active life, and it has not broken me down. I can say to you that the happiest days of my life have been my busiest. Forty years ago the gospel of thrift and methodical energy were taught. Boys heard nothing else than that if they wanted to get on in the world they had to work, and work hard: that their future depended entirely upon themselves. Even their horrible examples of idle rich men's sons were not wanting. We all understood it. Most of us acted upon it. I should think it would be a good idea to start this propaganda again. The gospel of idleness—less work, more amusements which in one way or the other are paid for by the public, is the old doctrine again which ruined ancient Rome—*panem et circenses*—free bread and the circus! It is a doctrine which gets nobody anywhere, except into jail or bankruptcy. Let us stop the mania for pensioning everybody. It seems to me I never pick up a newspaper but I see a new scheme for the maintenance of idlers and loafers. You cannot make a nation great by penalizing the thrifty for the benefit of the thriftless.

"You may say, shall we condemn ourselves to constant toil and no recreation? I have no idea of advocating any such course. But I will say to you, in the light of a pretty lengthy experience, that as you go through life you will find that your greatest pleasure will be not in the games which you have won, not in the recreations and amusements in which you have participated, but in the capable and efficient performance of work for which you have felt yourself properly equipped, and which enables you to play a useful and

constructive part in the community of which you form a part.

"You are Canadians. This is a distinctively—perhaps the most distinctively—Canadian University. What does that call to your mind? That you are one of nine million people to whom Providence has committed perhaps the greatest heritage that has ever been given to an equal number of people. Nine millions of white people. No negro problem; no yellow problem; no slum problem, because our climate does not favour, and in fact, does not permit of the existence of large slum populations. You are part of these nine million people, and by your academic training and your intellectual equipment, you are called upon to lead them. The resources of Canada are before you. It is the part of these nine million to determine how these resources shall be employed—in short, to make or mar Canada. It is theirs if they will, to build up a young nation that shall stand out among the nations of the world, achieving a new and distinctive nationality, combining, I trust, the best qualities of the races from which we have sprung, and standing before the world for peace, for orderly administration of law, for the sacredness of the family, for moral stability and for fortitude of character."

But it was not only the young whose performances fell under his displeasure. For them he had pity and a measure of understanding. But for the wild orgies of the money-mad older generation he had nothing but a contempt to which he gave free expression. His letters during this period are filled with reference to "frenzied finance", which was the term he freely used. "Of course", he said in a letter of June 4, 1928, "Manitoba is not interested directly, but Manitoba is interested in the general campaign of frenzied finance which seems to be in full swing at the present time, the purpose of which is to inflate capital of corporations serving the public, and to load on to the public the subsequent necessity of paying dividends on inflated capital." He analyzed, with biting comment, a flotation then before the public. A group of financiers had bought a public utility: they planned to get the whole purchase price back



by the sale of shares to the public, while they proposed to keep control by retaining possession of the shares that carried management powers with them. "They make the public pay for the property," he wrote, "and then of course they will initiate a campaign to get higher rates to get dividends on the watered stock." He suggested that the "Western papers"—by which he meant the "Sifton papers," the *Manitoba Free Press* of Winnipeg, the *Regina Leader-Post* and the *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*—should take part in the campaign against this particular flotation, which had no direct relation to the prairie provinces. "This", he said, "is not a matter in which the Province of Manitoba is concerned especially, or Alberta or Saskatchewan, but this is just part of the general campaign to inflate stocks and load them on the public, and you can't fight this practice by selecting only one particular case in which your own constituency is interested. The financiers can beat you easily if you adopt that policy. You have to fight all along the line."

During these years of rising stock values, with the public avid for new issues and indiscriminating in their purchases, a man with a widely-known name and with the command of resources had the door wide open to a field where millions were to be made. All that he had to do was to join in the game of buying properties, recapitalizing them at the top figure that cupidity could suggest, issuing gaudy prospectuses well starred with big names, and raking in the shekels of the confiding investing public. But Sir Clifford had no part or lot in this orgy of inflation. He remained aloof from it, critical, hostile and sceptical. He foresaw, drawing upon his experience and his knowledge, the inevitable crash.

## V

Because Sir Clifford retained in his retirement his political influence, and was potentially and at times actually a

factor of first-class importance in public affairs, there was an attempt by those who feared his influence to keep in current circulation the charges and insinuations which had been employed against him during the days of his activity. This tide of detraction, though it lessened in volume and in venom as the years passed, never wholly ceased while he lived. As we have seen, the conception of Sir Clifford which was carefully concocted and put out for such general circulation as it could command, was that of a man who was in league with the "big interests" against the welfare of the "common people." It had its origin in factional Liberal feuds, when his Whig principles clashed with the radical programmes of the party's left wing.

His preference for having things done by effectively-organized corporations, under arrangements which gave the government a measure of control—the building of the Crowsnest Pass railway by the Canadian Pacific Railway, the handling of continental immigration by the North American Trading Company, the colonization of an area in Saskatchewan by the Saskatchewan Valley Land Company are instances—in place of by direct government action which he believed would be less effective, seemed to suspicious and partisan minds to confirm these charges; and for a whole generation there were periodic attempts to revive these old prejudices when influences, exercised directly or indirectly by Sir Clifford or which could plausibly be attributed to him, threatened to interfere with plans financial, commercial or political. These attacks came sometimes from the Conservatives in retaliation for forays into the political arena; sometimes from financial interests which, in keeping with what was in essence a class feeling, resented his refusal to "play ball" with them; and also, as in the earlier days, from honest visionaries or aspiring demagogues, who ever and anon found in some personal action or in some course followed by the newspapers with which he was asso-



ciated, the pretext for a noisy defence of popular rights against the charged machinations and fell designs of Sir Clifford Sifton.

With this narrative of Sir Clifford's public life nearing its end it may here be fitting to note briefly some of the services to the public, in furtherance of or in defence of their interests, rendered during the last twenty years of his life by Sir Clifford.

It was due, primarily and chiefly, to his efforts that the project in 1909-1910 of having the water-powers of the international section of the St. Lawrence River turned over permanently to private interests came to nothing. Out of this discussion, and again chiefly as the result of his advocacy, a Dominion water-power policy was formulated, by which the alienation of these natural resources was forbidden. He was one of the earliest opponents of the policy of permitting the export of surplus power, and whenever this question came up—as it did as late as 1925 when the development of the Carillon was under consideration—he was active and outspoken in his opposition.

In matters of transportation he, directly and by the agency of the newspapers with which he was associated, battled for the restoration of the Crowsnest rates, and supported their extension over the Canadian National lines to Quebec; was instrumental in forcing an investigation into the shipping combine on the Great Lakes, which established a measure of public control; and was active and outspoken in demanding cheaper ocean freight rates, and the withdrawal of the discrimination against the Canadian route in the matter of insurance rates.

He defended the Canadian National against persistent attempts to circumscribe its activities and limit its freedom of action, by ingenious schemes which involved the subordination of the publicly-owned road to private interests. It

was to safeguard the Canadian National that he broke his silence in the 1925 election.

He was the only outstanding man in the business and political world who publicly identified himself with the view that our banking system should be modified, in order that the public interests might be better served. His opposition to bank amalgamations, with the centralization of credit control in fewer hands, was open and avowed.

These are hardly the typical activities of one who prefers the privileges of the few to the interests of the many. The public in fact had no more alert and courageous defender than Sir Clifford Sifton; that the fact was not universally recognized illustrates one of the primary defects of democracy—inability at times to know its friends.



## CHAPTER NINETEEN

### THE CLOSING SCENE

Is not short paine well born that brings long ease,  
And lays the soule to sleep in quiet grave?  
Sleep after toyle, port after stormy seas,  
Ease after warre, death after lyf doth greatly please.

—Spenser.

SOMETHING is said in the introduction about Sir Clifford Sifton's relationship with the *Manitoba Free Press*, of which he was the principal proprietor for many years. In time his five sons became associated with him in his interest in the *Free Press*. His eldest son, John W. Sifton, was actively associated with the management of the *Free Press*, apart from the years of the war, as director and latterly as Secretary-Treasurer. In 1927, Sir Clifford Sifton retired from the board of the *Free Press*, but this implied no diminution of interest in the work of the newspaper. In November of that year he and his sons greatly extended their newspaper interests by purchasing the *Leader-Post* of Regina and the *Star-Phoenix* of Saskatoon. He took a lively interest in these new properties and spent much of the summer of 1928 in the West dealing with problems of organization, management and policy. Following this his youngest son, Victor, took general charge of these newspapers.

It was very observable, while Sir Clifford was engaged in these activities in the summer of 1928, that he was in failing health. He had suffered in the preceding three or four years a series of shocks and disasters. The death of Lady Sifton in February, 1925, was something more than

the tragedy of the severance of a life-long bond of mutual affection. With his physical disability, which in his later years tended to become absolute, Sir Clifford kept his contacts with his outside world largely through the devoted services of his wife. Her death meant in this as in other respects an irreparable loss. Thereafter he dwelt in a vast lonely silence broken, it is true, from time to time by the intervention of his family and friends; but lacking the hourly and daily ministrations and solicitude of one who had been for over forty years his friend, adviser, helper and comforter. Not even his stoical self-control could keep from his friends evidences of the desolation of spirit that followed his loss. In June, 1928, he suffered a second bereavement when his second son Winfield B. Sifton, for whom he had high ambitions, died. These shocks, supplemented by the effects of a serious operation in 1927, from which he never altogether recovered, culminated in the late autumn of 1928 in a breakdown in his health. To friends who visited him during the winter of 1928-1929 at Sea-Breeze, Florida, he expressed doubts as to his recovery. To the writer, who was one of these visitors, he said, in saying what proved to be the final good-bye: "There is a fifty-fifty chance that I shall not be alive in three months."

These apprehensions did not seem to be justified by his physical condition or by the apparently confident attitude of his medical advisers; his friends were concerned but not fearful. He was up and about by day; he was cheerful in demeanour; in the evenings he was in good spirits as he talked mostly about old times and old friends. It was to his youth, his early career and the triumphs of his young manhood that his thoughts winged their flight in these weeks when the fires were burning low. In conversations with the writer, however, he showed considerable interest in current affairs. The Hawley-Smoot tariff measure was at that time engaging the attention of the United States



congress, and he was disturbed over the effect not only upon the prosperity of Canada but upon the good relations between the two countries. He deprecated the drumming-up of anti-American feeling in Canada for political purposes which was already going on; but thought that Canada, out of commercial necessity, should take whatever steps were possible to increase trade with Great Britain and the continental nations of Europe, to make up for the lost United States markets.

He discussed the possibility of transferring the bulk of the iron and steel imports into Canada from the United States to English companies, and to continental cartels, thus facilitating the sale in those countries of Canadian products which were threatened with exclusion from the United States. The St. Lawrence seaway project also claimed his attention; note of his considered views, as set forth in a letter to a member of the Dominion government, has already been made. He expressed his regret that the Dominion had not taken a firmer line, going ahead resolutely with the work and defending its course in the courts if there was objection by the provinces. He said he could not believe that any court would find that power developed incidentally to navigation works was not the property of the Dominion; he doubted whether if the Dominion had been resolute in this matter the provinces would have challenged its powers.

During March there was an apparent improvement in Sir Clifford's condition. His letters took on a more cheerful tone. Writing on March 28 he said he thought he would get home all right by May 1st. He was looking forward to attending a horse show in Philadelphia in May, in company with his sons. Early in April there came word that the improvement which had been reported in March was not being maintained. His three sons who were in

Canada hastened south; the fourth, Clifford, was summoned from Paris by cable.

Sir Clifford was taken to New York, where he entered the Roosevelt Hospital for observation; and there at ten o'clock on the morning of April 17, while engaged in conversation with his son Harry, he died instantly of heart failure. He had just entered upon his sixty-ninth year. On April 19 he was buried from his home in Lawrence Park, Toronto, at Mount Pleasant Cemetery. The funeral ceremony, in keeping with his known wishes, was of the simplest kind. There was no music, no spoken panegyric—nothing but the recital at the home and by the graveside of the burial service of the United Church by the Rev. Richard Roberts. Of the funeral, a local chronicler wrote:

"The wealth, the intellectual power, the political importance of Toronto and indeed of all Canada, were represented at yesterday's last tribute to Sir Clifford as they are seldom to be found in one place at one time. Governor-General, Lieutenant-Governor, the Commons and the Senate, the Press and the pulpit, the schools and the universities, the marts of business and the fountains of finance, the learned professions and the fine arts, the army, the Bench, the civic rulership—all were represented there. The humbler walks of life were represented, too—for Sir Clifford's chief beneficiaries have been, and for long shall be, the poor and the under-privileged."

## II

When a man dies full of years, with his work accomplished, the public tribute is one, not of grief, but of appreciation and understanding. The death of Sir Clifford Sifton drew from the Canadian people, as expressed by the Press and by individuals, comment and appraisal remarkable in its range and sincerity. With the stroke of fate the mists which still lingered about his name and fame were cleared away; and there was instantaneous, wide-



spread and enduring recognition of his worth. "There is no such discerning auditor as death."<sup>1</sup> The most direct expression of this acceptance of Sir Clifford as one of the nation's great men, above party and beyond petty disparagement, was in *Toronto Saturday Night*:

"Whatever might be said of Sifton in the days when it was customary to depict him as both the Macchiavelli and the Walpole of our politics, it cannot now be denied that in all things he was a sincere patriot, ardently ambitious for the future well-being of his native land."

In this public expression of opinion there was virtual agreement upon points about which controversy raged during his active political life: the nation-building qualities of his immigration policies; the disinterestedness which lay behind his disagreements with his party; his continuing power as a political force; the certainty of his permanent place as a statesman in the memories and affections of the people of Canada. There was recognition that his qualities fitted him for the highest place of all, and that he had probably missed the leadership of his party and the premiership by reason of his physical disability. "But for his deafness", Sir Daniel McMillan said, "he would have achieved the position of Prime Minister; he was a natural leader and took the first place in any gathering of men." A similar opinion was expressed by Sir John Aird; he thought it a great misfortune that Canada had lost his services in this capacity.

"Sir Clifford Sifton", said the *Toronto Mail and Empire*, "never reached the highest place in office under the Crown, but though he served under able leaders, he was never overshadowed by them. He was under no handicap in the matter of political sagacity, but the failure of his hearing put him at a great disadvantage. There is no reason to suppose that in office he felt himself less than the equal of his chief, but he never manifested a fretful ambition to hold first place."

<sup>1</sup>R. E. Knowles, *Toronto Star*, April 20, 1929.

St Albans, Feb  
9. 1929

Dear Harry

In my present state of health it is wise to prepare for eventualities & I am writing this to you to provide for some things I don't care to bother putting in a will or other document. Consider this letter as addressed to my four sons whom I know I can trust to carry them out.

I of course know that I can rely on you all to loyally carry out my wishes.

Finally with respect to your newspaper property when great prosperity comes I advise you not to regard it as a spending fund to spoil yourselves and ruin your families. Regard it as a sacred trust to buttress and strengthen these properties and enable you to hand them down as a great and powerful influence for the good of Canada. In time of prosperity prepare for trouble. Follow the policy that I have followed. I believe I possess it. It will be the thing that I am most proud of that I can rely on you to be wiser, throughout life and to train your children in the same tradition.

With Love

Yours affectionately father

SIR CLIFFORD'S CHARACTERISTIC HANDWRITING

This is part of a letter of final instructions sent by Sir Clifford in February, 1929, to Harry Sifton





This is a just observation. If, as would be natural, he ever envisaged the premiership as a future possibility, he kept his ambitions to himself; and certainly he never let this ambition exercise a prudential control over the public profession of his convictions. He was in no sense a careerist.

There was comment upon the remarkable fact which gives Sir Clifford a distinction unshared with his contemporaries, that upon all the major issues, upon which he carried his views to the people, he never failed to get their verdict.<sup>1</sup> He never knew personal defeat; nor suffered the stroke which to the generality of public men is as inevitable as death, of coming to the point where the public treats their arguments with indifference and rejects their policies with contumely. The feeling—whether justified or not—of public ingratitude and the sense of frustration which form the bitter potion served in their turn to every great public man, he was never called upon to taste. And that he achieved this distinction not by following public opinion but by informing it and leading it, is the measure of his political greatness.

With the recognition of this singular circumstance in Sir Clifford's life there went the observation, complementary to it, of his remarkable retention, in private life, of political influence. There have been many instances in Canadian public life of the aura of distinction dimming as the cabinet minister becomes the private member, and going entirely black with his disappearance into private life. As private member from 1905 to 1911 Sir Clifford remained one of the great figures of the House of Commons. "From the private benches" said the *Ottawa Journal*, (April 18, 1929), "he spoke without the trappings of office, but his prestige was such that his words commanded something of

<sup>1</sup>"His record of continued success in the advocacy of the causes in which he believed has not been equalled in Canada and probably no where else."—*Edmonton Journal*, April 19, 1929.



the authority of Great British private members like Dilke or Bright." He retained the ear of the country as private member and later in private life. "His interest in national questions", the *Journal* added, "remained undimmed, and whether he was preaching conservation of our resources, or emerging, as he occasionally did, to make some pronouncement about public policy, he always commanded attention." There was also notable recognition of this characteristic of Sir Clifford Sifton's career in the *Toronto Mail and Empire*:

"Not many of the men who have quit active politics and turned to private business, figure in the background of public affairs. Their careers are over when they slip back into private life; but not so with Sir Clifford Sifton. He continued to be a strong influence in Canadian politics after he retired from office. His great abilities, no longer applied in governmental or parliamentary work, still played their part in times of national crisis, when his sagacious counsels were given to good purpose. No greater compliment could be paid than that from his place of retirement his approval of policies adopted by former political opponents was valued and his co-operation desired."

There were generous and appreciative references to his work as Minister of Immigration. In Western Canada especially there was full recognition of his unequalled services to the State in this respect. A representative Western comment was that of the *Edmonton Journal*:

"Thanks for the most part to the brains and energy that he brought to his duties, a tide of immigration set in that transformed the West, and brought about the greatest era of development that the Dominion has known."

The *Journal of Commerce*, Montreal, observed:

"Whether or not in his death Canada has lost her greatest public man, is bound to be a matter of opinion, but there will be no two views upon the question that in

the building up of Western Canada, both in breadth of vision and in administrative capacity, he stands alone."

The London *Advertiser* spoke of "the providential regime of Clifford Sifton." "A new Canada", it said, "emerged with the twentieth century, and Clifford Sifton's name is written imperishably in this inspiring chapter of Canadian history."

Among striking references to his immigration policies were those made in a letter to the London *Times* by David C. Lamb, Commissioner of Migration for the Salvation Army. He wrote with special appreciation of a feature of Sir Clifford's policy which in the days of his Ministry was under constant fire: "He had the clear perception that any attempt at a standardization by forms in departmental organization would be futile. The human element would persist, and could only be successfully dealt with by a Minister in close touch with his work, unfettered by orders and regulations, settling a case this way to-day, another case in a different way to-morrow." The spirit behind the immigration policies, initiated by Laurier and Sifton, as indicated by these methods, had as much to do, in Commissioner Lamb's opinion, with inducing the wave of immigration, as the lure of free lands.

### III

In the public comments and tributes following Sir Clifford's death the references to his position as a sportsman were almost as numerous and commendatory as those which bore upon his public life. Though the scope of this book is limited to recording his relationship to public affairs, space must be taken for the merest note upon activities which, during the last twenty-five years of his life, afforded him relief and distraction from the pressing concerns of life, and gave him a field upon which he displayed in a



new setting his characteristic qualities of zealous industry and thoroughness. Perhaps his love for horses and horsemanship went deeper than his devotion to public life or private business. Certainly it would have taken a political event of catastrophic importance to deflect his interest by a single degree, if he were intent in his stables upon the schooling of horses in preparation for a horse-show. His love for horses and his instinctive aptitude for choosing them, training them and displaying them were part of his hereditary equipment; they came from his fox-hunting Irish ancestry. When he was the young Attorney-General for Manitoba, Mr. Sifton's spanking team of driving horses occasionally got into the petty carping political criticism of the day; there were those who imagined there was something sinister about his possession of the best driving team in the province. When in 1905 he retired from office, he found himself with sufficient leisure to give effect to his long-cherished desire to have a stable of jumping and show horses. His interest was entirely limited to horses of this type—he never had anything to do with the racing game. In this, as in all other enterprises, Lady Sifton was participant and adviser. She was herself a notable horsewoman. The first of the Sifton trophies in point of time was a first prize for jumping, presented by the Earl of Dufferin to Miss Arma Burrows when she was fifteen years of age.

The Sifton stables were founded in 1905; when Sir Clifford died, twenty-four years later, over four thousand ribbons and four hundred cups told the story of his triumphs. These included world records of high and broad jumps. His horses, with Sir Clifford and the "Sifton boys" in charge, were familiar sights in the world's great horse-shows. They were at Richmond Royal Horse Show, Olympia, London, The Hague and Saumur in 1911 and 1912; while appearances at the leading Canadian and American shows were annual events. It would be tedious

to record the long register of his winnings; but his achievements at the National Horse Show in 1913 might be noted as his maximum performance. Upon that occasion his horses carried off the championship in the heavyweights; the lightweights; the reserve class in middleweights; the hunt team and the high jump.

It must not be supposed that it was "ribbons, ribbons all the way" with Sir Clifford, as the breeder and shower of horses. He got off, in fact, to a rather bad start; but pertinacity and experience soon put him in a position where he could do battle year after year with his competitors. There is no sport in which competition is keener; and stables which maintain, year after year, a high percentage of victories do so by unslackening alertness and all-around efficiency. Sir Clifford Sifton's success was very largely due to the personal attention he gave to the matter; he was very far removed in his methods from the disconsolate rival stable-owner who, after a disastrous season, said that he could not understand his lack of success as he signed every cheque put before him! Sir Clifford's skill in choosing men, so conspicuous in other fields, was again markedly displayed in this matter of horse-showing; for in 1908 he picked out a young man, known only as a promising rider, who in association with him developed into the most successful stable manager of the times. This was Mr. Jack Hambleton who thereafter, with the exception of a few years' interruption due to the war, was in charge of the Sifton stables and as such was in direct charge of the training and showing of horses.

Sir Clifford bought his own horses when he did not breed them himself. He had no prejudices as to thoroughbreds or otherwise; all horses were alike to him if they could go through their jumps and do their jobs. He did not build his stable by paying fancy prices for horses with already established names; he picked and paid good prices



for likely youngsters, training them himself. At his country home, Assiniboine Lodge, near Brockville, which he built in 1906, he trained his horses assiduously during the summer season; and when he built his residence in Lawrence Park, Toronto, he added extensive and thoroughly equipped stables. If business engagements permitted, he handled his string himself at the horse shows; and was relentless and determined in fighting for honours. Five o'clock in the morning "schoolings" of the horses and their riders were not rarities on these occasions. Much of the riding was done by himself and his sons. Thus the winning hunt team at the Royal Horse Show in Toronto, in 1923, was ridden by Sir Clifford and his two sons Victor and Clifford. He was then sixty-two years of age.

Sir Clifford did not keep his show horses in cotton-batting between shows; he believed in using them. In fox-hunting and cross-country riding, to which he was passionately addicted, he rode the best horses in his stables; and among the famous horses who carried him over the fences and ditches were Confidence, (the world-famous high jumper; record eight feet, half inch), Dorchester, Sunday Morning, Viceroy, Lady Rosamond, Lizmany, Moonlight and Pericles. He was a founder of the Ottawa Hunt Club in 1905; and later hunted with famous packs in Canada, the United States and Great Britain. For three seasons he hunted in England with Warwickshire, North Warwickshire, Atherstone and Pytchley. This was during the war; he found in hunting a relaxation from the war strain, and this also enabled him to give his sons and their comrades a taste of the sport of kings in their brief periods of release from the front line.

Mr. E. H. Macklin, President and General Manager of the *Free Press*, who for thirty years had the closest business and personal relations with Sir Clifford, in his tribute made fitting reference to this phase of his activities:

"If sportsmanship is an attribute of statesmanship, as has been shown by many of the great statesmen of Britain, then Sir Clifford was not only a great sportsman but a great statesman. His judgment as to the points of a horse was unerring, as exemplified by the countless blue ribbons that adorn his home, won in the best rings of Canada, the United States, Great Britain, and Europe. Wes. Speirs, a former officer of his department and a horseman himself, invited to inspect Sir Clifford's stables, was shown at the last Sir Clifford's personal hunter. His brief remarks on the merits of this horse were: 'Sifton, neither Hannibal, Julius Caesar, Napoleon, nor Wellington, ever threw his leg over a better horse than that.' He was a true sportsman, for I never knew him to wager a dollar on a race. A fearless rider, nearly always in front; no fence was too high, no hazard too great for him to attempt."

#### IV

Of the many personal tributes to Sir Clifford Sifton which found expression in statements to the Press and in letters to the bereaved family, only a note or so can be made. There were recollections of his college days, by Chancellor Bowles of Victoria College. He recalled the high prophecies that were made in their student days of future greatness for the Sifton brothers—prophecies fulfilled for both. They had the distinction, he said, of being at the time of their graduation the youngest graduates the college had ever known. Mr. Justice Masten of Toronto who had been his room-mate at College, spoke of his loyalty to his friends as being his greatest characteristic—a note which recurs like a refrain in most of the letters. Mr. J. D. McGregor, Lieutenant-Governor of Manitoba, who had been Sir Clifford's chief of staff in the hard fought political battles in the Brandon area, laid special stress on this quality in the notable tribute which he paid him in the *Manitoba Free Press*.

Sir Daniel McMillan, sole survivor of the Greenway government, recalled Sir Clifford's spectacular rise to a



position of political influence as his qualities were revealed to the people of Manitoba. Sir Wm. Mulock, the last of the "cabinet of all the talents", gathered together by Sir Wilfrid in 1896, spoke of the impression made upon him by the intellectual and administrative capacity of his young colleague. Mr. Mackenzie King noted the boldness and courage of his views. "He never indulged in petty or venomous criticism of political opponents, and he was himself unaffected by any kind of criticism which was merely personal and did not go to the root of the policy he was advocating." Mr. Rodolphe Lemieux, who entered parliament with him and was for a brief period his colleague, spoke of his overpowering power in debate, and of Sir Wilfrid Laurier's admiration for his political capacity, which continued after the breach. "With the old chief", said Mr. Lemieux, "there was no rancour. When a national question was being discussed he would often interject, 'what does Sifton think?' That query was a tribute to Sir Clifford's ability."

Sir Robert Borden, who entered the Dominion parliament when Sir Clifford did, was during their fifteen years of common membership of Parliament an outright and vigorous opponent, and thereafter was in close association with him in the advocacy of causes in which they had a common interest. He made a statement to the Canadian Press which may well serve as the last word in this record of the public life of Sir Clifford Sifton:

"He was a man of remarkable, indeed exceptional ability, of very strong character, of great foresight and of wide vision. For many years in the House of Commons I opposed him strenuously. He was a redoubtable opponent and a powerful debater. Later, in the reciprocity campaign of 1911 and throughout the war, I had his invaluable aid and co-operation. In 1911 it was suggested and indeed urged that he should become a candidate, but he thought it better in the interests of the cause he had so much at heart that he should remain in the background. From time to time

during the war I consulted him on very difficult questions, and I have a most grateful memory of his assistance, especially during the extremely trying months of 1917. He was indefatigable, earnest and unselfish in his efforts to bring about the formation of a strong union government. Again he put his personal interests in the background, for he could have been a member of the administration which I eventually succeeded in forming; but he declined, for the reason that his inclusion might create antagonisms that otherwise could be avoided. I found him always generous and considerate in his estimate of his political opponents. He was inspired with a sincere patriotism, and no Canadian had a broader outlook or a higher optimism as to the future of our country."

THE END





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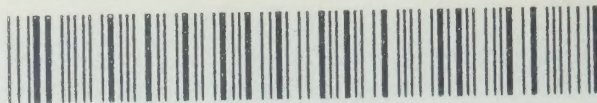












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